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INTERCEPTIONS AND GRACES

The heavens are scratching themselves with dozens
of interceptions
Which burst like holiday fireworks
I tell you don't worry
And am frightened by the fireball overhead
Maybe
Gog and Magog and the besieging enemy
And the Nine-Second War of a different age
And the Yud going into the Great Light in the
heavens
And the Light becomes air that divides between
waters and waters

And I think in the black night
When above me myriad points of light
Over Kingdom and over the Female whose root is
the will to receive
And how it rules
And how it mixes up all Creation
The will to receive

The heavens are wounded with flashes of radiance
and electricity
And it is incumbent on us
To rectify the will to receive
To refine the root of our nature to attain devotion
Above me are chariots, missiles, whistles, fragments
Conflagration

In order to emanate the light of wisdom with
kindnesses
I stand before you with all my will and fears
In order to emanate
In order to emanate
In order that he may appear
That he may save
In order that he may calm
That he may calm

—Chana Kremer



Esther Lixenberg Bloch, *Phoenix*, collage on black canvas paper, 30.5 cm. X 40.5 cm, 2024

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CONTRIBUTOR EXCHANGE

Below are titles of poetry collections in English by contributors, as well as URLs. For a completer listing, including books in Hebrew, see derondareview.org/contribex.htm.

L. Ward Abel, *The Width of Here* (Silver Bow, 2021), *American Bruise* (Parallel Press, 2012), *Green Shoulders: New and Selected Poems 2003–2023* (Silver Bow, 2023)

Hayim Abramson, *Sefer Shirat HaNeshamah* (Book of Songs of the Soul), www.hayimabramson.com

YakovAzriel is the author of *Threads from a Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis* (2005); *In the Shadow of a Burning Bush: Poems on Exodus* (2008), *Beads for the Messiah's Bride: Poems on Leviticus* (2009), *Swimming in Moses' Well* (2011), all with Time Being Books. Many of his poems can be found on the 929 Tanakh site, at <https://www.929.org.il/lang/en/author/36669>. Also, see <http://www.pointandcircumference.com/kippatbinah/azriel.htm>

Hamutal Bar-Yosef's extensive oeuvre, in Hebrew and in translation, may be surveyed at <https://hamutalbaryosef.co.il/>. She has two bilingual poetry collections: *Night, Morning* Syracuse University Press, 2008, and *The Ladder*, Sheep Meadow Press, 2014; a third, *The Miraculous Mistake*, is forthcoming with Sheep Meadow Press.

Mindy Aber Barad, *The Land That Fills My Dreams* (Bitzaron 2013).

Jane Blanchard's latest collection is *Metes and Bounds* (Kelsay Books, 2023).

Danila Botha, *Got No Secrets, For All the Men (and Some of the Women) I've Known*, and *Things that Cause Inappropriate Happiness* (short story collections); *Too Much on the Inside and A Place For People Like Us* (novels), *Call Me Vidal* (graphic novel).

Esther Cameron's Complete Works (6 vols.) are available on Amazon. Also see www.pointandcircumference.com

Amichai Chasson, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amichai_Chasson

Roberta Chester, *Light Years* (Puckerbush Press, 1983); *A New Song: Poems Inspired by the Weekly Torah Portion* (Mazo, 2023). 2023). www.triplecrownpoetry.com.

John Delaney, *Waypoints* (2017), *Twenty Questions* (2019), *Delicate Arch* (2022), *Galápagos* (2023), *Nile* (2024), <https://www.johnmdelaney.com/>

Esther Fein has three books of poems: *Journeys*, *A Fine Line*, and *Carved from Jerusalem Stone*.

Mel Goldberg has published three books of haiku: *The Weight of Snowflakes*, *A Few Berries*, and *Seasons of Life.*, all in 2018.

Paula Goldman, *The Great Canopy* (Gival Press, 2005), *Late Love* (Kelsay Press, 2020).

Katharine Gregg, *Mere Thread*, Word Poetry 2021.

John Grey's latest books, *Between Two Fires*, *Covert*, and *Memory Outside The Head*, are available through Amazon.

Paul Hostovsky's newest book of poems is *Pitching for the Apostates* (forthcoming, Kelsay Books)

DB Jonas, *Tarantula Season*, Finishing Line Press, 2023; *Flight Risk: Poems and Translations*, Kelsay Books, 2025.

Gunilla Theander Kester is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *Mysteries I-XXIII* (2011) and *Time of Sand and Teeth* (2009).

Ruth Netzer's books are listed on her website, <https://www.ruthnetzer.com/>.

James B. Nicola's latest three (of eight) poetry collections are *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense* (Shanti Arts, 2021), *Turns & Twists* (Cyberwit.net, 2022), and *Natural Tendencies* (Cervena Barva Press, 2023).

Susan Oleferuk, *Circling for Home* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Those Who Come to the Garden* (Finishing Lines Press, 2013), *Days of Sun* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), and *When There Is Little Light Left in Late Afternoon*, (Kelsay Books, 2022).

Andrew Oram, <https://www.praxagora.com/>

Imri Perel, www.atgalya.com

Reizel Polak's books include *Four Entered Pardes* (Greville Press Pamphlets, Warwick, UK, 2016); *And Where Did We Say We Were Going* (Black Jasmine, Sharon, MA, 2015); *Among the Red Golden Hills* (Black Jasmine, Sharon, MA, 2012).

Marjorie Sadin, *The Threads from Which We Fly*, Xlibris, 2004; *Vision of Lucha*, Goldfish Press, 2014; *Your Breath*, Goldfish Press, 2023.

Rikki Santer, *Resurrection Letter: Leonora, Her Tarot, and Me* (Materialist Press/Cereal Box Studio, 2023)); *Shepherd's Hour*, Lily Poetry Review Books (2025) May be contacted through <https://rikkisanter.com>.

P.C. Scheponik, *Psalms to Padre Pio* (National Centre for Padre Pio, INC), *A Storm by Any Other Name* and *Songs the Sea has Sung in Me* (PS Books, a division of Philadelphia Stories), *And the Sun Still Dared to Shine* (Mazo Publishers), *The Breakout*.

Vera Schwarcz, *Ancestral Intelligence* (Antrim House, 2013), *Chisel of Remembrance* (Antrim House, 2009), *A Scoop of Light* (March Street Press, 2000), *Fresh Words for a Jaded World, and Selected Poems* (Blue Feather Press, 2000). For other works see between2walls.com.

Nolo Segundo, *Soul Songs* (2022), *Of Ether and Earth* (2021), *The Enormity of Existence* (2020), all with Cyberwit Press.

Marian K. Shapiro, *Players in the Dream, Dreamers in the Play*, Plain View Press, 2007.

Jean Varda, *Oracle: Poetry and Prose*, 2022; *She Was Attached to Symmetry*, CreateSpace, 2014.

Florence Weinberger, *These Days of Simple Mooring*, *Ghost Tattoo* (Tebot Bach, 2018), *Sacred Graffiti* (Tebot Bach, 2010), *Carnal Fragrance* (Red Hen Press, 2004), *Breathing Like a Jew* (Chicory Blue Press, 1997), *The Invisible Telling Its Shape* (Fithin Press, 1997).

David K. Weiser, *Ladders: 333 Poems* (2020), *Ladders II: 336 poems* (2024), both on Amazon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Nolo Segundo's "I Have Been to Places of Great Death" appeared on New English Review. Doug Stoiber's "Daredevil Jr." appeared in *LitNerds*; his "The Man in the Corner in the Dark" appeared in *miniMag*. Lois Greene Stone's "grandmother's advice to a new mother" appeared in "Mature Years" and "Shemom."

I. In Keeping with the Whole

IN THE SEASON OF IN BETWEEN

On the brink of October,
the warm air is on the edge of cool,
the blue sea is a flash of winter green.

Beneath the bight orange pumpkin moon
the leaves are in between, half in, half out of summer.
In the season of rose hips, apples
purple grapes, bittersweet berries,
lighter or deepening,
are all caught in Heisenberg's strange uncertainty.

The magenta edges of the oak,
the tips of the maples are red and gold,
dipped in Autumn's brush,
they are still green,
though there is no turning back
caught in the rush of one season to the next.

I awake from a dream and for an instant
I have lost my bearings.
Nothing is black and white,
neither here nor there,
all things either or,
every blessing mixed,
all things more or less,
simultaneously both after and before,

both moving out of and turning into,
hovering in the limbo of something
and something else,
and all the world becoming,
moving in and out of in between.

— Roberta Chester

FOR THE BANYAN TREES AT KIBBUTZ EIN GEDI

Sacred to millions in foreign places,
here you stand
in the Holy Land,
and just as holy here,
rooted in dust
such as we are made of,
your limbs raised in praise.
And you, banyan elder,
standing with your banyan tribe together:
We savor your heavenly shade.

— Batsheva Wiesner

IN EARLY SPRING, Guo Xi (Song Dynasty 960 - 1279)

Ink on darkened silk, mountains
in clouds of dream.

Weight against space balances
rising, narrowing, hanging
over emptiness.

The Painter denies the necessity
of gravity for the presence
of trees.

Following The Way rising and falling occur together.

See how the water pours down,
narrow, widening in descent
and there, roofs like little hats on pavilions, tucked
so deliciously in. He's made them small —
you have to look carefully — in keeping
with the whole.

At the base,
on either side, tiny fishermen
prepare to take out their boats,
for it is spring.

Above it all
floating beside the mountain
a poem whose brush strokes compliment
the Painter's skill.
Two become one.
The stamped red seals, discreetly harmonious.
The big one at the top, perhaps the Painter's mark
the fainter small ones on the side
collectors' records of their travel here.

I have no seal to mark my travel
but this morning some grief, lodged in me
is soothed by walking here.

— Katharine Gregg

Early Spring (早春圖)

Guo Xi (郭熙, active 11th century), Song Dynasty (960–1279).
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm,
National Palace Museum, Taipei

KATSURA GARDEN

Where to put the first rock?
And then, where to put the next one?
And the next?

— Marian K. Shapiro

ACTION AND CHANGE

The all-day rain has made
its mark. Earthtones give
way to what approaches
fluorescence, a green resulting
from a pent-up wintry county
wide half-sleep.

The cold is over.
A slight dropping slope almost
tumbles but thinks better of it
because nothing today will test
those elastic creek beds in such
steadiness. The wait ends
quietly.

And the change becomes inevitable
in hindsight, no scuffles now,
no shelter needed. Yesterday the sun
began setting farther north between
a magnolia and water oak.

By summer
it'll miss the pond altogether as it lands
behind the northwestern woods. Gutters
rattle clear the layers of skin from water halls.
Funny, the self-evidence of action.
It was always going to be.

— L. Ward Abel

BLUEBELLS

As we pull into the parking lot of Three Creeks Metro
Park, I am hoping that these trails may be where my son
could decide to unglove his heart. It's spring, the season
of perhaps, for it's been winters of stagnancy and dark
thoughts. I know the way to the confluence and we
stand together along the bank where Blacklick, Big
Walnut and Alum Creeks converge their muddy,
rhyming waters as they make their way to the Scioto, the
Ohio, the great Mississippi and then on to the Gulf of
Mexico. We bend our gaze. He tells me that he wants to
jump right in and float away to see where the water will
take him. I say, that's the truth that lives in tributary.

We walk together some more, this time alongside
Blacklick Creek, our faces in the water among schools of
shadows, a flotilla of ducks, the ballet of dragonflies.
We're heading to Bluebell Trail where I want him to be
in the midst of the gossamer sheen, a stunning sea of
azure. More than a mile of woodland magic, thousands
and thousands of blue bell-shaped flowers, their clusters
glowing within the greenery. Folklore says look for the
fairies that live there. I see he may be welling up. I say it
feels like a cathedral, the vast columns of tall trees

reaching to the heavens. He nods. The rest of the trail
back to the parking lot fills with the slow rhythm of our
rhyming footsteps. It's spring. The season of perhaps.

— Rikki Santer

[UNTITLED]

From year to year the rain
finds it harder to overcome climate change,
from year to year it struggles on
and finally gets through and arrives, falls and pelts
down,
like my joy, like suddenly this happiness.

— Hamutal Bar-Yosef
tr. EC

THE BLUEBIRD

The last time I saw a bluebird
was in the mid 2000's.

It was early August.
I was crossing a field
in some Audubon tract.

A trail scythed its way through long grass.
Bird boxes stood out like highway motels
for rare summer visitors.

Perched on a rickety wooden fence,
remnant of an old farm,
was where I spotted that avian treasure.

Its heartbeat ruffled the feathers
of that sienna chest.
And its pastel head and wings
mirrored the horizon's rim of sky.

I did not dare approach.
Bluebirds are hounded enough by other birds.
They don't need my intrusion.

For as tender as my intentions are,
I still look like harm to some.

I did not know at the time
that I would not see another bluebird
up to and including the time
when I am composing this.

But think of this poem as a bird box.
It is written in hope.

— John Grey

IN THE GARDEN

No words, silence, breath, and listening to wind through
leaves

Then stunned by a fragrance

Of acacia trees that reaches me from far away in Givat
Ze'ev

No bells in the sound of leaves but a silvery tune

This pleasure a song I suddenly remember

From the last time

Tiferes she b'Tiferes is the last day I counted*

Too far away for the wind, the clouds are sun-dappled
like leaves

On my avocado trees whose pleasure lies in the fruits I
love to eat

Unlike the acacia whose flowers hang heavy with a scent
too sweet for this world

Their blossoms clustered like bells in the landscape of
my morning prayers

Fragrance of black letters on white in my siddur

Acacia wood built the Mishkan in the desert

Where I heard bells on the hem of the Kohen Gadol

Where pleasure infused his every motion

I am the last generation before Mashiach

Whose fragrance reaches me

Though another wind conspires to carry him off

The pleasure of this moment in the garden

Hearing the silvery tones of bells

From the far-off acacia

Its fragrance coming to infuse all the world

In these last days we wait

Stand transfixed in the wind that carries sound and
scent

A trim of golden pomegranates and bells on one's hem

The other-worldly fragrance

That graces acacia trees

A gentle wind that stirs their leaves

A pleasure so rich and deep

It can last forever

— Varda Branfman

*This refers to the mystical intentions associated with the counting of the omer (see Leviticus 3: 9-21 and Deuteronomy 16: 9-12). In a Kabbalistic practice that has become widely accepted, the 49 days are linked to combination of two of the seven Sefirot (Divine emanations). Tiferes is the Sefirah of beauty, balance and compassion.

THE IMMORTAL GARDEN

When the last comes

I would like to think of a garden

not the magnificents of manors clipped in plan and
design

but the small one I sowed

by tossing seeds and waiting

I can't picture which garden though

one year red poppies full

memories of the dead popping through

one year sun flowers swaying

gallantly inviting me to dance

Some Springs there was flax, the new blue

to wash away winter's gray skies

Delphiniums, dolphin named, purple and azure

waterspouts onto land

with baby's breath like a bridal shower

forget-me-nots the blue-eyed bower for all the young
year's dreams

Autumn brought coneflowers, blanket flowers

coreopsis, daisies

orange and yellow for cool misty days

these willful flowers with their unfathomable needs

immortality carried in these small seeds

When I can only see at the edge of my eye some splashes
of gold, blues, red and green

peaceful like a warm sun smiling at me

the memory of a garden will come to me

which garden

I don't know.

—Susan Oleferuk

LATE RAIN

Like a cactus flower suddenly in bloom

Like a snail slowly gliding

after an unexpected late rain

that broke the early sharav,*

The People of Israel say out loud:

Am Yisra'el Chai!

We are still alive!

Like a flamingo standing on one leg

among the wild cranes and cormorants

in the waters of the Huleh Lake

in the northern Galilee,

The People of Israel declare:

We will survive!

To be a people, proud and free,

And all the rivers still run to the sea

— Brenda Appelbaum-Golani

May 2025

AND MOSTLY OF DASHA

This is the end of an uncommon
 day dusk by the Charles
 a November hour Fading
 the eye is given to hold
 a scene across the sky
 as Turner might have painted
 Streaming above us rose-colored
 clouds sheer veils adorning
 a rounded ivory-glazed moon

I want to hold our looking on
 this evening's brilliance together
 as we stepped out of the hotel
 away from the gathering of grown-old
 children of the Shoah

I want to hold the affection
 of hands taking mine and mostly
 of Dasha's—the strength of her grip
 small frail wouldn't let go

—Reizel Polak

NOT YET

At times I wonder, "Will this year be my last?"

Spring, with her lemony forsythia
 Followed by tiny buttercups appear first
 Next comes a burst of yellow and
 Purple pansies, and riotous multiflora
 Roses with their heady scent and, of
 Course, myriad leaves adorning the trees
 No, it is not yet my time

Then as spring progresses into
 Summer, and the multifloras
 Begin to fade, the nearby pond
 Calls to me, as well as the peep
 Frogs and owls heard while
 Star-gazing by an open fire
 No, not yet

And then the fall, cool and crisp
 With leaves changing to gold and
 Crimson, then fading to brown as they
 Dance to the waiting earth, while the
 Chipmunks and squirrels scurry to
 Gather and stash Mother Oak's acorns
 No. It is not now

Then as the cold wind blows and diamonds
 Hang from white pine needles, and glittering
 Snow mounts up in the yard, I'm drawn outside to
 Track the prints of foxes and deer; and despite the
 Aching of my frozen knees and fingers, I finally
 Recognize that I have much more life in me
 No. It is not my time

—Dawn McCormack

*

Thunder is just a sound
 To those who have no God,
 But we can hear His Word

Behind the rumbling cloud
 And see His flash of light
 Whence creation first occurred,

And we ignore the crowds
 Who neither hear nor see,
 Who live and die absurd.

—David B. Weiser

NASCENT BLOSSOMS

Little white dots coming into focus
 against a background of the vast, brilliant
 blueness of the morning sky.

Fine shoots,
 like a child's fingers
 reaching for his mother;
 fine shoots,
 decorated with
 white nascent blossoms,
 grasping upward
 at the late winter sunlight.
 And the blossoms,
 fulfilling their eternal
 struggle for life,
 despite the cold
 of this Jerusalem morning.

It is a symbol of hope
 of a beautiful fulfillment
 for a future,
 imminent and inevitable.
 And as we notice this annual miracle,
 we too look upwards,
 sensing the light,
 the beginning of creation,
 and the power of its creator.
 It is He who has brought us this,
 This harbinger of the approaching season;
 a season witnessing the land's rebirth,
 signaling the continuity of the thread of life.
 This image of birth and new beginning
 resonates deeply
 within the historical soul of a Jew,
 recalling for us
 the emergence of our nation,
 on a past and future day
 of nascent blossoms.

—Don Kristt

II. Out of the Depths

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Out of the depths of the earth
 Rotten roots have sprouted
 And defiled the waters of the spring, the earth erupted
 The doorposts trembled
 Gog and Magog spread out on the land
 From the depths of the earth
 Lava gushed up and mountains sprouted
 And wounded the shell of innocence
 And cries of anguish flew upward.
 Out of the depths I cried to you G-d
 And now the ministering angels are circling overhead
 Ascending and descending and searching
 The face of the earth in waves upon waves
 And a great hand inscribes letters of fire and smoke
 Mene mene tekel upharsin

— Rachel Saidoff Mizrachi
 tr. EC

BURROWING OUR WAY BACK ONE MILLIMETRE AT A TIME

We were budding branches turning our faces
 towards the sun. We were soft petaled red and white
 anemones, delicate purple irises, bright yellow daffodils.
 The skin kissed our skin and sprinkled our noses and
 cheeks with delicate drops of gold. The world and
 everything in it felt boundless.

We wanted to be outside for as long as we could.
 We wanted to sway and shimmy to the pulsating,
 futuristic rhythms of trance. Colourful canopies hung
 over us as we danced, pink and orange, purple and
 green, forming white star shapes over our heads. The
 performer's tent flashed neon. We moved wildly,
 crowds of us shaking our curls and dreads, waving our
 turquoise rings and smiling as our teeth glowed,
 sweating in our patterned caftans, and red bikini tops
 and shorts, lifted on each other's bare shoulders,
 laughing and shouting, our energy endless.

There was room to spread out, to lie under the stars
 in sleeping bags and bright blue tents, to take in the
 beauty all around us; the trees swaying in the wind in
 the distance, the synths lulling us to sleep.

In the early morning, some of us were still dancing,
 kicking up dust, ambling with our arms around each
 other, some of us we were barely awake, bleary eyed,
 but we saw flashes of yellow and red shooting through
 the sky, we heard screaming and glass shattering, the
 whipcrack of bullets whizzing past our heads, we
 wanted to tell our friends to run but we knew it was too

late. When we saw the bodies all around us, some of us
 pretended to be dead.

When we were led into the dark, we felt our bodies
 change. Our limbs grew rubbery as we were pushed
 further down the rusting metal ladder, merging into a
 space narrow enough for us to move in single file, our
 shoulders hunched and merged with our sides, our
 thighs pressed into each other. We shrunk into
 ourselves. The air smelled like dust, like chalk and
 concrete and spray paint, like fear and nausea and
 hopelessness and claustrophobia. Our skin felt like
 blood and slime. They tried to bury us. They didn't
 know that we were worms.

People don't know enough about worms. They
 don't know how resilient we are, how little of
 everything, even oxygen we need to survive. They don't
 know that up close, we look like carefully rendered
 charcoal swirls, full of chiaroscuro, and texture. We're as
 beautiful and miraculous as any of God's creations. And
 we're chronically underestimated, if people think about
 us at all. Sometimes, I think, maybe it's better. You can
 survive for longer when people are thinking about you
 less. And that's all we wanted to do, you know. All we
 wanted to do was survive.

We didn't all love trance music. Some of us were die
 hard fans of Astral Projection and Man With No Name,
 we wanted to hear songs like People Can Fly and
 Dancing Galaxy, we wanted to whirl and move as fast as
 we could. We wanted to feel the rhythms in every single
 cell in our bodies.

Some of us thought it was cheesy. It was something
 to do in the latest in a string of exhausting national
 holidays. Rosh Hashana is a big one, it's a celebration of
 the New Year, all the apples and honey and extra sweet
 challah and hopes for the year ahead. Yom Kippur is
 serious and somber, you fast, you get sealed in the book
 of life, or death for the year, if you believe in that kind of
 thing. Sukkot is the one where we build a hut, where we
 eat outside and celebrate the harvest. So what better way
 to celebrate the harvest than being in a place where you
 can see orchards and fields for a whole week? It was
 Shemini Atzeret. How many people even knew what we
 were supposed to be celebrating?

On the morning of the last day, some people saw
 rockets in the sky. A few even filmed them, flying over
 our heads, as casual as fireworks. First it was a few, then
 it was the most any of us had ever seen. Code Red,
 people started yelling. Run, run. Kadima.

We started running in every direction.

We saw the guys in military fatigues, firing at
 anyone trying to escape. We sprinted, dashed to public
 missile shelters, behind bushes and the biggest trees in
 nearby orchards. Some of us hid inside a giant fridge.
 Some of us ran to our cars, desperate to leave, like so

many ants moving millimetres on a crowded path, people shooting at close range, and our cars, like origami and plastic toys, were easily crushed and punctured. We heard explosions. Then they blocked the roads.

Some of us lived in the area. Some of us had families, husbands, wives, and kids, teenagers, full cheeked babies with pudgy wrists and sweet-smelling skin. Some of us were grandparents. Some of us were kids at a sleepover, sleeping in Spiderman or Frozen print sheets, waiting to drink shoko or a slather of chocolate spread inside a half slice of pita.

We never knew how many of us there were. Some of us were hidden in houses, moving around while the bombs shook the foundations of where we crouched, sometimes we were sure this was how we'd die, from the fire of our own army. There was never anywhere to run. When we tried, chains around our wrists and ankles, or in filthy weeks old clothing, it was obvious to anyone who we were, and we were returned like delinquent sheep who'd wandered too far away from our owner. A few teenagers were branded using a motorcycle exhaust pipe.

Some of us were taken underground, crammed into a heat filled, narrow passage. Later, someone said something about hell, and someone religious said if this is *Gehenom*, we have twelve months to pray to be taken to *Olam Habah*. Great, someone else said, so in twelve months, we'll be dead, but we'll be better off, in the World to Come.

We struggled to imagine twelve more months. It was too dark to know what day it was, or how long it had been.

They didn't feed us much, but they gave us water. We divided grains of rice like they were magic beans.

Some of us slept on filthy mattresses, some of us slept on the floor. We were kicked and hit, told to be quieter, as if anyone could hear us. We told each other our life stories. We whispered about our interests, our families, our jobs.

We met the leader once. He was not what we expected. We'd heard he surrounded himself with the youngest of us, and we pictured him strutting like a lion, walking through the dark followed by tiny prisms of light, rainbows, soft fluffy clouds we'd yearn to talk to and touch, but it's just him, a slight, not very tall man, who fidgets and eyes us like a hyena eyeing a pile of carcasses. He has the cold-eyed gaze of a bottom feeder.

We gave each other lectures on our interests to pass the time. We talked about all the things we'd lost.

In my previous life I made art; I had a painting in my bedroom that said Jerusalem is Everyone's in Hebrew and Arabic

I had plans to organize soccer games for Israeli and Palestinian kids

I had plans to travel. There were so many countries I wanted to see.

In my previous life I organized international peace rallies, I drove Palestinian kids in need to Israeli hospitals, I pursued peace like my life depended on it then I went home and baked cakes for my grandchildren's birthdays

In my previous life I had a partner

I had two kids

I taught yoga and I practiced it everyday

I hiked with my dad

I had Batman pajamas, and my best friend gave me his cape.

I was learning how to teach Pilates

I had a mother who was dying. I knew it before, but I wanted as much time with her as I could get. I know she wants to be with me.

I had a boyfriend who loved me and I didn't know where he was

There was a girl I loved but I never told her. How would I tell her now? At night, I imagine different scenarios.

I fought with my baby brother before I left; instead of telling him his drawing was stupid, I wish I could tell him how beautiful it was

I yelled at my sister for borrowing my clothes. I wish I'd just let her have them

I had parents who drove me crazy, now I wish I could hear their voices

I had my own room, my own bathroom

I had clean clothes, a closet full, a washing machine, Band-Aids and Polysporin

I had a home

In my previous life I had colour and variation

I had gentle dreams, my worst nightmares were about work stresses or relationship stuff or friendships

I showered whenever I wanted to

I had two strong arms and hands and knees no exposed bone and blood

I used bathrooms whenever I had to go, I walked freely without asking for permission

No one's hands groped me as I tried to squeeze by

In my previous life I had friends

I had religious parents

Maybe I should have stayed home

In this life I play out these thoughts over and over

If I'd apologized

If I'd just told them

Had kissed him one more time, had hugged them.

We wondered if they somehow knew it anyway, if they sense our love, moving through the earth

like tiny currents, the way we could sense theirs. If they knew how hard we were trying, digging

and burrowing our way back to them one millimetre at a time. Worms move incrementally, but we're still moving.

It takes intense heat and pressure deep within the earth to form the world's hardest and most valuable gems.

We don't know how many days it's been or how many are still to come.

But we have stories to tell you, stories where we amaze each other and ourselves.

Where we protect each other, where we advocate, where we refuse where we ask for things.

For prayer books and corn flour. For an older man to go free in our place.

When we remember who we were.

When we aspire to become survivors, leaders, diamonds.

We could hear your voices, as if they'd been blasted over a loudspeaker, we're waiting for you, be strong, blessing us like they did on Friday nights, *May God Bless You and Keep You and Shine His Light On You, May You Feel His Presence Within You Always, and May You Find Peace*. Just Survive, we need you. We love you.

So, we imagine ourselves standing in the light again. We imagine ourselves standing on a sidewalk, with traffic lights and cars and kids on bikes, our ears filled with the sounds of life. We imagine ourselves in our homes, in your arms, our bodies wrapping themselves around you like the branches of a strangler fig. We imagine planting ourselves so deep we can never be uprooted again. We imagine not having to imagine anymore, being able to tell you face to face that you were the reason that we made it.

—Danila Botha

HUMANITY?

The sky is pale and colourless
the clouds weeping
the wind wailing woefully
the sun won't show its face.
Tearful trees, mournful, sway to and fro
crestfallen birds quiet
perched on branches out of view
forlorn flowers listless, almost lifeless
sullen animals skulking
not knowing where to put themselves.
And where is humankind?

The human race silent
while angels on high are crying
in uncontrollable anguish
and God Himself is grieving for lost humanity.

—Julian Alper

TEARS FOR ISRAEL

Though I am not Jewish
Nor even overly
Religious
My heart cries
For Israel

True, I may be old;
Still, even as my
Sight grows dim
And my aching
Limbs weaken daily

I can distinguish
Right from wrong,
Good from evil,
And what was done
October 7th is pure evil

Yet, the strength I have
Seen portrayed, in the
Face of all this horror
Makes me believe that
Israel will survive

Even so, the pain
Will long endure
For such loss cannot
Be erased. Yes, my
Heart cries for Israel

—Dawn McCormack

PLEASE ACT

Here in the lined tunnel
Sprayed with warm red paint
G-d near and far
I call to you
From my turned intestines
G-d whose name is mighty
Do not desecrate Your name
Do not cut off the covenant
Do not chop off
You name from the mouths of our infants
Who bleat toward you like kids
Seeking a shepherd
For on Your account we were killed forever
And on Your account alone we shall live
On Your mercy
On Your name in our mouths
Act so that we shall no longer say
Act for the sake of those slaughtered for Your Oneness.

—Araleh Admanit
tr. EC

ABDUCTEES AND SOLDIERS

21.6.25

Never for even a moment may we forget
Those who were dragged away. Their cry remains
In the air, as they in the black heat
Of Gaza are still rotting in iron chains.

In the month of March the flower of youth went out
To shield the mother, the infant, and the old,
From the cruel foe, in the breach they stood stout
That the border towns in safety might unfold

That the nation might at last securely dwell
That the land may not shake underfoot, nor the sky
 overhead,
That from this earth that drank dear blood may well
New life, new flowering, to recall our dead.

For every fallen soldier there are those
Who mourn – the mother, father, and all kin,
And a whole nation that must feel the throes
Of the dead and the living, deep within.

It is forbidden to forget, to desert
Our brothers there, in the clutch of cruelty,
We must do all we can to heal their hurt -
Tomorrow, if not today, we must set them free.

–Haggai Kamrat
tr. EC

MOTHER AND SON IN THE SHELTER

Your hand dropped limply from mine
Sleep my child the treasure of my soul
Mother caresses you with a look
Sleep my little child

The shelter is dark and cold my child
 Dream now my son of lamb and kid
 Perhaps it will warm my heart a little
 To know that you my son are at ease.

Outside is the noise of war
The beasts shoot without distinguishing
Missiles move in the twilight
Hush, sleep, my son, yours are the dreams.

But reality is so hard
And the door of the shelter is heavy
The old Persian man with his jaws
Wants to slaughter people.

Now it is quiet in the shelter
The mother is silent her hand relaxed

The son, his mother's angel, sleeps
Her anxiety for her son has fallen asleep.

—Haggai Kamrat
tr. EC

FAITH

During the memorial siren
Man stands as if lost:
One sways to and fro
Like his father in prayer.
One hitches his belt
Like his brother before battle.
One hunches over
Like his child in the shelter.

One writes as if believing
That no more will be lost.

–Omer Berkman
tr. EC

AS I DRIVE

As I drive home in my car
music from an Arabic radio station pounces on me,
bursts through the window of the classical music station
skewering Chopin
slaughtering Beethoven
extinguishing Bach
hewing Shostakovich in pieces
lopping the head and limbs off Bartok
singing in a trill that is a scream: *Kibbush! Kibbush!**

—Hamutal Bar-Yosef
tr. EC

*Kibbush – “conquest,” often used to refer to the Jewish presence in Judea and Samaria, or even in Israel itself, by those opposed to it. In English the accusatory word is “occupation.”

THE DECREE UPON US

I, the pajama with the dinosaur
Woke up to a voice that rose and fell
That penetrated the heart
I leaped with a trembling body
Into the earth
To be absorbed deep inside
With all the neighbors
Between cement walls
In a pale dim light
I wanted the dinosaurs to come out
To fight back
And they only screamed without sound
How long
Are we sentenced to flee

–Araleh Admanit (tr. EC)

LIFE IS SIPPED FROM A TEASPOON

Life is sipped from a teaspoon,
 Little bits each day.
 The great abundance
 Perhaps is hidden for the time being,
 But still remembered.

I try each day to taste
 Some kind of essence, that will remind me of life,
 That life, the one we had.
 To grasp the remnants
 That are still here.
 To remember beauty,
 The sounds, the tastes,
 The smells of the sea
 The murmur of waves.

— Yehudit Solomon
 tr. EC

WHOM SHALL I BELIEVE TODAY?

And perhaps I will choose today to believe
 The calm blue of the sky,
 And not the helicopters threatening from above.
 Perhaps the newspapers are carriers of lies
 And only the white of the moon's footprints tells the
 truth.

Perhaps all the madness around us
 Is only a nightmare,
 A world of lies and illusions,
 And the truth is hidden in the fresh green of a vigorous
 tree,

In the lovely pink, the dreamy purple,
 The vivid yellow of the flowers,
 The laughter of babies,
 The pleasant touch of skin, recalling forgotten things,
 And perhaps in my pen
 Still scribbling thoughts
 And keeping faith with my soul
 Which is still floating in the regions of life.

— Yehudit Solomon
 tr. EC

INURED DEPT.

I hear a bird begin its call
 And at first
 I thought it was a siren.

— Larry Lefkowitz

SHORES OF WESTERN GALILEE, WINTER 2024

The sea sends little breakers.
 The shoreline keeps its coves, the sun's rays ripple
 Round the rocks and further up to Lebanon,
 They fade on the horizon, where border boulders,
 Huge and gray, feign tranquility.
 Look, sweetheart, at our feet the waves
 Toss conch shells and sea-worn bits of colored glass
 Onto the sandy beach, then take the prizes back
 With jeering regularity.

Long ago Jeremiah cried out
 Thieving priests and hollow kings
 Would bring the Lord's wrath
 And foreign invaders burn our fields and trees,
 Disperse or bear us off,
 And break our Temple stones.

But belief was steel, renewal held sway.
 We Israelites in caravans came back.
 Faith found a new day
 And held us in her mothering arms.
 Within and out, over and over,
 Escaping even ovens libel-lit,
 Our people fell but rose.
 Today patrol boats guard our coast
 And howitzers return enemy fire
 As mere whitecaps hit the beach.

Dear, let us shield our love
 And keep watch on family and friend,
 For despite the porches on our tree-lined streets,
 Our homes and businesses that seem so usual,
 Tunnels hide sly battle tools around our edges,
 And enemies hold even toddlers hostage
 While we take our walk along the shore
 And go about our normal ways
 Beneath the swoop of taloned war.

— Eli Ben-Joseph, February 2024

SOMETIMES A SORCERER

for Kfir and Ariel Bibas

Blinding copper auras of
 Two titian crowned toddlers
 Ignite the firmament.
 Cosmos erupt into full bloom
 Sparkling shrapnel sings across the sky
 Bringing birds and butterflies to Eden.
 Hummingbirds come to thirst no more.

The boys, hand in hand, hover over the garden floor.
 A freezing blaze, frantic with silent snakes, star-nosed
 moles
 Shimmers and sparkles under their bantam toes.
 While the beasts and freaks wiggle and writhe
 The ginger boys dematerialize.
 In a whisper pass into ash and dust.
 The wailing mother the keening father
 Get louder and louder as their children evanesce.

Sometimes a sorcerer might intervene
 But even the Gods and their miracles fail
 Their finite candles snuff, smoke, and sputter.
 To be relit on days declared to enshrine the vanished,
 To fix a brand on hearts, a tattoo on minds.

The inhalations, exhalations and lamentations
 Tumble the cairn carcasses, shapeshifting through
 centuries
 Until what is remembered becomes what is imagined.
 And what remains is a story to be religiously retold.
 Don't make your bed with sheets of tears.
 Around they'll come again after the agony.
 See the coronas rising in the East.
 Twin suns for another generation.
 Then back onto the perpetual wheel of madness
 Eternity is already here.
 Time is a concertina. It is not a line.

— Anne Hall Levine

A MOMENT AT THE WALL

I was standing before
 the great and holy wall,
 the wall of our patriarchs
 hugging har haMoriah.
 And as I said the ancient prayer
 את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה תצמיח
 A bright yellow flower
 Sprung up from among my words
 And as the flower continued to grow,
 To enlarge-
 in my mind's eye,
 an image emerged
 among the delicate
 yellow, filamentous petals.
 From its very center
 I felt a sense of strong recognition
 a familiarity,
 a great presence,
 emanating a sense of kingship,
 growing slowly and clearly
 in size, glory and majesty.
 It was as if the tefilla
 was responding to my yearning,
 to the words I spoke,

sharing with me an image,
 of the flowering,
 of the beautiful renewal
 of Davidic kingship.
 Today, it is my prayer,
 Perhaps,
 tomorrow,
 a reality.

— Don Kristt

THIS IS NOT A DREAM

Ceci n'est pas un rêve

after Rene Magritte's paintings "The Treachery of Images," with its inscription "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" and "The Castle of the Pyrenees" (displayed in Jerusalem's Israel Museum)

I dream of the day when castles in the
air will float nonchalantly by
without a care in the world
be they castles in Spain
in the Pyrenees or in Jerusalem.

I dream of the time when people will say
this is not a pipe bomb
this is not a ballistic missile
this is not a machine gun
this is not a bullet.

I dream of the day when the third Temple
will descend from on high
like a hot air balloon landing
atop a majestic mountain.

I dream of the time when lions
and lambs and wolves and kids
will frolic together on bouncy castles
under the vine and under the fig tree
with none to make them afraid.

I dream of the day when people
will remember Herzl's words
"If you will it, it is no dream."

I dream of the time when
people will say
this is not a pipe dream.

—Julian Alper

WHAT I WANNA SAY

I want to quote King David
What
Is going on right now
And what are people
That You chose to create us?

Somewhere
Within a few kilometers
Of where I write
King David sent words
Scattering
Echoing
Through the trails
Up and down the hillsides

Words that still seek out
The
What
And try to get there
And we go through fields
Of pain
Of delight
To understand the
What

So let's not forget
The fields of good and Chessed
Pure waters
Fields we can only
Dream about
That is what I wanna say.

—Mindy Aber Barad

*

Desperate faith emerges
From dire circumstance:
The ship is sinking fast,

The house goes up in flames,
The soldier falls in war,
The helpless orphans wail.

And still our hearts believe
In heaven, not in hell,
And a world where all is well.

—David Weiser

CYCLE – TESTIMONY. IN THOSE DAYS AT THIS TIME

1.

All the same, something is standing there
Between the ruins of two mighty buildings.
It stands — like a statue — it is a statue
That was not destroyed in the terrible bombing of the city
From which my mother fled as a young woman before
the war

A statue stands and the folds of its robe are like waves
— as if it had donned the cloak of the High Priest
— holding something hidden like a scroll
In memory of the tablets of the covenant.

*

In another photograph
On the edge of the ruined city
On a hill
A majestic stag stands tall
Like a primeval god
And the heights of his horns

*

Do not put forth your hand to the ram
Neither do anything to him, do not put forth
Your hand, do not put forth your hand to the ram
In the splendor of his power, the heights of his horns
Like the crowd of trees in the wood are exalted
Do not put forth your hand to the galloping ram
Do not put forth your hand to the shining ram
For at the edge of the cliff he will stand and contemplate

2.

And all the lizards and all the frogs that had assembled
in secret
Arriving one after the other, also the iguanas,
And the geckos, year after year, assembled and covered
the porch
Clinging to the walls, with claws and tails, still testifying
to tell me
That from dust we came and to dust we will return
In the colors of earth and fire

*

As if he conjures on the thread of your sleep from which
they burst forth on their hidden path

In an inner dreaming, flashes of messages that seek to
tell you that something-someone jumped into
what for no reason,

Convulses, hurts, pinches, awakens, tosses the limbs of
your body without meaning, as if they were
runners of the chariot

Of absorption and transmission of anonymous
knowledge in dream and waking. Who is it
conjures within us with his electricities,

Beyond waking and sleeping, day makes a mock of day,
beyond the inwardness of the body and its
husks,

Trying to correct its injustices.

*

Before the body seizes the soul, the soul will seize the
spirit

And the spirit will seize the body and the body will seize
what hurts and is defiled

And the excrement and what fades will seize the soul
within the body within the spirit

And we will ascend and descend and be humbled and
stink and rise up and elevate and be uplifted

And be broken apart and break apart and ascend and
bring down and be

Soul spirit higher soul higher spirit and that is the exit
Within it and beyond it soul and he called and screamed

3.

All the poems that are written in this time,
unconsciously seek to be

The rectification of souls in their passage in the birth
canal toward the great Hidden –

And all these trembling songs seek to be an iron dome
To protect the intelligence button of a world that
betrayed us, to open the gate of

The garden, to hold on to ourselves to each other so as
not to fall.

*

The deep seas covered them –

The hole in his forehead no longer hurts him

The darkness around him no longer hurts him

His parents no longer hurt him

His beloved no longer hurts him

His orphans no longer hurt him

His longing no longer hurts him

The earth beneath him no longer hurts him

They went down into the depths like a stone

>>>

*

Don't look behind
 Don't look at the hole
 Don't look at the pit
 Don't look at the blackness

Turn your face to the light
 And believe in it.

The day will come when again we will say
 As it is written "Rouse yourself, arise from the dust"
 The day will come – "Put on your robes of splendor" –

– Ruth Netzer
 tr. EC

TIME OF BEGINNING, TIME OF DAWN

In the hour before the beginning
 The basement people shall pass in the darkness
 At night without stars in the skies.
 All the people of darkness
 Will join the evil that broke out
 Pass – in a march of sleepwalkers
 The victory of the pitch black circle.

Afterwards we will sense the thirst
 Of the abyss of living waters
 That will surge at dawn.
 The water clock will display the time of expiration
 Of the black waters
 A living wind will come then, pure water.

All the suns of the world
 Will arrive from every abyss
 Glow together over all the bending winds
 Announce that Evil has reached its end
 And dawn is upon us.

– Balfour Hakak
 Translation: Schulamith C. Halevy

III. The Dream of Life

TIME IN BETWEEN

This morning, I once more beat the sun,
 first one rising and waiting to greet the day –
 not counting the counterparts of crescent moon
 and cosmic handful of shrinking stars.
 So there we are celestials and non in the darkness
 just before dawn.
 The trees, shadowy clusters of limbs, trunks, and
 leaves, look like the last vestiges of dreams,
 waiting to be chased away with sleep at the coming
 of morning's first light.
 It is a strange mood, this space between night's last stand
 and the flourish of daybreak's light.
 In the middle of a left-over pool, one among the shadows,
 searching for first light, waiting for the dream of life
 to wake me.

– P.C. Scheponik

AUTHOR, BORN 1939

You may not realize that
 the author of this poem you are reading is
 exactly three years old. Today, visiting for her birthday,
 she saw
 her grandma, a tough old lady her daddy calls a
 Communist,
 shoot a snake with a long rifle, right on the front steps of
 her dilapidated farmhouse in New Jersey. Last month,
 however,
 this writer was a 9-month old in a wood-barred crib,
 listening to
 her parents talking, raised voices in a language she was
 just
 becoming friends with: *Baby* she hears. *No*. Something's
 wrong,
 but what is it? Is *baby* her? Another time, during "the war,"
 shopping with her mother down near the subway station,
 she wonders (in her loud toddler voice) why one place
 hasn't got
 big letters on its plain grey door, and why there is no
 window
 in the front so they can see the things it sells, like the
 other stores.
 And why do they have to knock before the man will let
 them in.
 Her mommy shushes her, index finger on her lips, and
 the man asks
 what she wants to be when she grows up. Later, she
 hears her mommy
 tell her daddy she had to go to the *black market*
butcher since

>>>

there was no meat at the A & P, none at all. At two, she
 knows her colors,
 and she knows *butcher*, and *market*, and that place was
 brown, not black!

She doesn't write about these things.

She writes about the usual topics poets write about –
 Love, beauty, nature....But also violence, war,
 famine, disease, despair, the horrors newspapers and
 the internet delight in. She writes because she likes to
 talk on paper.

She talks to you, to all the ages you have been. Like two
 children,
 meeting in the playground, making friends, at least for
 that afternoon.

—Marian K. Shapiro

DAREDEVIL Jr.

At five years old – and only having just learned how to
 ride
 His two-wheel bike without a training wheel on either
 side –
 He sat astride his shiny Schwinn, his gaze fixed on the
 hill –
 A steep descent on graveled path – and summoned up
 his will

His little boy bravado, unchecked by common sense
 Or painful lessons dearly learned from past experience
 No parent there to intervene, no sibling to decry
 His tempting fate and safety where such daunting
 hazards lie

But only in his mind the thrill of pushing off the summit
 And pedaling with all his might, straight down the hill
 to plummet
 Like flying! Yes, indeed! Take wing, and feel the rush
 within!
 The five-year-old, so brave and bold, set sail upon his
 Schwinn

He pedaled once or twice and then, o'ertook by gravity,
 His legs could pump no faster in a free-fall downhill
 spree,
 His baseball cap blew off; his watering eyes went wide
 in panic
 His trembling hands, white-knuckle gripped; his
 agitation manic

Along the gravel path, the trees appeared as only blur
 As faster, ever faster, toward the crash that must occur
 For now, a realization – when he ventured from the top
 His thoughts were all of speed; he never reckoned how
 to stop!

Alas, it was a biggish rock along the pebbled strip
 That jarred the handlebars and ripped them from his
 panicked grip
 Askew, the wheel in front dug in, and o'er the bike did sail
 The boy slid, scraping skin and bone along the rocky
 shale

In tears, and with his mangled Schwinn, he limped and
 whimpered home
 Where Mother, horror-stricken! sprayed a disinfectant
 foam
 On bloodied, bruised and ragged skin on elbows, hands
 and knees
 Then dried his tears and kissed his brow; her hug, a
 gentle squeeze

She tucked him into bed and read his favorite bedtime
 story,
 Then clicked the light, and said goodnight, and told him
 not to worry
 His bike was not beyond repair, she'd fix it soon enough
 "Yippeel!" he thought, then dreamed of doing more
 daredevil stuff.

—Doug Stoiber

STICKY

Mira sat on the porch, peeling an orange. The rind split
 easily, juice slicking her fingers. She thought about
 calling him, just once more. But as she pulled the fruit
 apart, tearing membrane from flesh, she saw how clean
 the break could be. She licked the citrus from her hands.

—Rowan Tate

IN THE TRAIN, ON THE CELLPHONE, NEXT TO ME

No, I don't want you to say
 that you want me to come,
 I get it that if you say yes you mean yes
 and that you're sick and tired of all my games.
 But what I want is to feel
 that you really want me to come,
 Abba.

—Hamutal Bar-Yosef
 tr.: EC

Abba – an Aramaic word adopted into Hebrew and generally
 used by children in addressing their fathers. It has neither the
 formality of "Father" nor casualness of "Papa," "Daddy" or
 "Dad."

grandma's wisdom for a new mother

Remember playing house
 with your favorite doll
 giving unconditional love,
 singing songs, whispering
 words when dolly slept
 in the tiny carriage
 stuffed with toys?
 Feeling responsible
 as she lay on your
 pillow, her plastic
 body was stroked.
 Now grown,
 with a real baby,
 it's scary.
 Trust yourself
 as you did
 with dolly.

— Lois Greene Stone

GIVING THE LOSS BACK ANY WAY POSSIBLE

I prefer going walking on over the sand dunes,
 moving past the fields of blue wildflowers
 with the ease of a desert local used to sitting
 on the front porch after the desert rains, admiring
 the full moon, a woman who knows who she is,
 a lover of dogs and purple mountains,
 planning out a simple life using less since you left,
 and sticking to the way things are for me now faithfully
 day by day. Reclaiming a life is what it is all about today.
 I am letting the old flower petals fly off into the wind
 and I'm waving at the mountain blue birds in flight
 as if they are my newest dearest friends,
 and I'm moving along as I used to with a strong step,
 a graceful easy lope on my way home or anywhere
 I need to go, everywhere, anywhere, and now I am
 on the move again, exactly as I was before the loss.
 Saying hello and waving goodbye, goodbye to all that.

— Charlie Langfur

TIP OF THE BLADE

The times I wish you hadn't gone
 And carved a chasm through our lives
 That's when I sigh from dusk to dawn
 The times I wish you hadn't gone
 No sleep, my window shade is drawn
 My memories as sharp as knives
 The times I wish you hadn't gone
 And carved a chasm through our lives

Doug Stoiber

SPRING SONNET

For herself

You know old love songs pass through your body.
 They're routed, wireless in aether. Stray words
 get lodged in your aging brain, and long years
 echo. Each scrap of note no one else hears
 is light as the first sight of her. She stirs.
 You shift in bed, captive to melody
 playing your bones. They must pass through her, too.
 You roll on your back, let ghost threnody
 unspool springtime songs. Memory, old and near
 in time (there were times without her, when fears
 crawled out from under your bed, held you still
 but trembling, like fading music that spills
 through your body). The equinox is near.
 It hangs you up. She's still your spring, each year.

— Mark Mitchell

THE MAGICAL PART

Every year when I taught the electrical unit—the
 difference between static electricity and circuit
 electricity—I'd give each kid a balloon, tell them to blow
 it up and tie the end (they usually
 needed help tying the end) and rub it on themselves.
 RUB, RUB, RUB. That was always the fun
 part. Then we'd put it on the blackboard where of course
 it would stick—that was always the
 magical part. Now, if they could tell me the principle
 behind it—why the balloon was sticking,
 what was happening with the protons and the
 electrons—they could keep the balloon. And if
 they couldn't, well, we'd pop the balloon. I had a giant
 safety pin and we'd pop the balloon:
 POP, POP, POP—that was always how all the other
 classrooms knew when I was doing the
 electrical unit. I miss teaching. I hated to give it up. I
 haven't been able to do anything since the
 amputation. Here I sit in a wheelchair waiting for a
 kidney transplant and a prosthetic leg. I've
 gained twenty pounds since January. I'd like to get back
 in the classroom, but I need a leg first.
 Can't get into the classroom without a leg. People treat
 you differently when you're missing a
 body part—they will talk to the person you're with
 instead of to you. Or if they talk to you, they
 talk louder, like you're hard of hearing. Kids are
 wonderful, though. No inhibitions. They walk right
 up and point: "What happened to your leg? Where
 is the leg now?" Like ta-da: the leg is gone. In the
 grocery store I have a scooter—the store provides
 them. I turn the key and presto!

>>>

I go zooming up and down the aisles. The kids all think
it's the cat's meow. They'd give anything to ride it.
I'm like the pied piper: they follow me through the
store, asking for a ride, asking where the leg is,
asking questions no adult will ask or deign to
answer.

—Paul Hostovsky

REUNION RECKONING

Rye, New York, June 2017

They come to confirm what they remember —
the beautiful, the popular, the smart —
but learn that each was a casted member
for a future, mostly ad-libbed, part.

The tallest boy was never basketball
material, despite the coaches' call;
the wrestlers are still wrestling their weight.
The girls admit their crushes now, too late

to make a difference to a teen's morale.
One hated school and gladly went to war.
Most heard their calling in a new locale,
or, drawn by spouses, sought an open door.

The high school tour becomes historical:
golden plaques of names in perennial
rollcall, refurbished classrooms and labs;
gone digital, the library's looking drab.

They walk the halls where they used to hurry
with their lunch bags and books (and steal a kiss).
They hear the bells ring without the worry.
One pushes a wheelchair with tenderness.

Unfurled around the auditorium,
banners proclaim eternal champions;
respected rivalries adorn the wall.
It is, for them, a victor's banquet hall.

The buffet table caters to each diet
with vegetables, a choice of meats, and sweets.
The cash bar queue struggles to keep quiet
when the host rises and formally greets

the seated guests, offering a welcome toast
with her commemorative, garnet-colored cup.
On cue, the class historian jumps up
to lead them in their alma mater song. Most

look happy to be found and recognized
for who they were or have become, disguised
or not: the women strove to keep their age
in check; the men preferred to turn the page.

Now, after fifty years, comes a film sequel
to their play *The Class of '67*,
remastered, and distilled of good and evil,
its captive audience bound for heaven.

Its premiere was a classic in its day:
stars were stars, the sets were self-designed,
the script was well-rehearsed, the school band gay —
reviews were positive, the seats, assigned.

Today, they gather here to reminisce
how much back then they chose to miss,
as they unreel their movie, clip-by-clip,
with soundtrack, and make-up team, and grip —

while their lost classmates' names, faceless and mum,
scroll up the credits in memoriam.

—John Delaney

THE MAN IN THE CORNER IN THE DARK

Nightfall in Autumn, winter nigh, a shadow on my soul
Life's final pages, turning swift, beyond my will's control
A presence in the room besides myself, and I remark
"Who are you, Stranger, hidden here beside me in the
dark?"

No answer issued from the man in the corner in the dark.

An eerie calm, my mind at ease, but burdened nonetheless
I sensed the stranger's presence augured sorrow, I confess
His nearness in this shadowed room foreboding did impart
And I could only wait to learn my future in the dark
What doleful message from the man in the corner in the
dark?

"I fear you, Shadow. Tell me how this dread encounter ends
"Your ghostly presence with me woeful destiny portends
"Please calm my fears and put at ease my wildly tripping
heart

"For I am old and frightened at our congress in the dark."
A whispered, "Say goodbye" spoke the man in the corner in
the dark.

"Your mind has lost its moorings, and adrift your memory
strays

"Those near and dear to you become but phantoms in a haze
"Your grasp of life's events erased, no longer clear and stark
"A stranger to your past, confused, and stumbling in the
dark

For you are now the helpless man in the corner in the dark."

—Doug Stoiber

IN THE WINTER COUNTRY

My hair has turned gray
 and my once rapid steps have become halting.
 My quick response to comments
 has become thoughtfully slower
 and I do not trust political discussions
 with the few friends who still remain.
 My once keen eyesight is now lost in mist,
 I walk into a room and forget why,
 my back aches every morning,
 and the soothing sound of my voice
 has become a wheel crunching on gravel.
 My hearing needs assistance.
 Each day, a little more of me disappears.
 I have been exiled to the winter country,
 where spring never returns.

—Mel Goldberg

SHABBAT MORNING, MAALE ADUMIM

In the clear cobalt sky, one small
 Cloud, like a downy feather.
 It had a spine, branched at the top,
 That seemed a human figure

With arms upraised. I said to it,
 "You there, lone in the sky,
 You will soon fade and dissipate —
 As, of course, shall I."

—Esther Cameron

SPARROW'S EULOGY

The little box held the dead sparrow
 the sparrow, one of many who lived in the yard
 his black bib the sign of a worker
 his small voice day to day, a bard

Who loves the sky loves the earth and back and forth it
 goes
 the grass, the small seeds, the warmth of dirt all this he
 knew
 the company of like creatures
 deep green solitude

His end a last hearing of the sounds of the wind
 ruffled feathers feeling like flight, no song to sing
 his soul light and clean flying straight to heights he only
 guessed
 peered through the shadows of trees that watched over his
 rest

Sparrow added to the world
 and who can say as much
 he did not understand the powerful hurts
 and who under this sky does.

—Susan Oleferuk

KADDISH FOR MY SISTER

You are the silent mirror
 of my mind
 closed and weeping
 You are the Robin singing
 green and fragrant
 You are my hands my blood
 my Sister
 You lie in a pine box
 in a cement lined vault
 I would lie beside you
 I would go anywhere with you

You held my hand, taught me
 how to walk, led my on ice
 skates over a frozen pond
 Taught me how to bare sorrow
 and disappointment
 Thanked me said you owed me

I am lost, I grab for the thin
 threads that will lead me to you
 I still hear you I still feel you
 I want to go with you but it's
 not my time so I pray to the clouds
 to the angels I beseech them

—Jean Varda

ROUNDEL AS SOCIAL REPROACH

"It was his time" is often said
 By those who think these words sublime
 To those who know about the dead
 "It was his time."

A saw worth not a damn or dime
 Cannot stop tears from being shed
 For this loved one lost past his prime.

A life both good and bad was led;
 The bell has tolled, then sounds the chime
 When silence should be shared instead:
 "It was his time."

—Jane Blanchard

MY MOTHER IS THE MOON

When she was young, she was skinny and climbed trees.
When she was very old,
she became frail and thin again.

Then she died. She was cold as the moon. But her light still
glowed. She was our mother. Even though she was dead she
lit the darkness of the sky. She looked down on us as if to say
it's time to go to bed or to do your chores.

We saw her every night. She came to us only as an orb, not
some angel or ghost. We were amazed at her stillness.
When she was alive, she never stopped moving, always
cleaning or taking care of us.

As a mother, she worried about us. Now she is indifferent
as the moon. But her light makes us believe that she
will never leave us.

That's why, when they ask if I grieved, I tell them when
my mother died I climbed a hill and watched the moon rise
and I knew it was my mother who even in life was a
shining.

— Marjorie Sadin

THE CONUNDRUM

In the cave of his mind the man
wondered why he would die.

He looked to the sky for an answer.
The sky was silent.

He journeyed to the summit of the mountain
but it only echoed his question.

He asked the waterfall but it was
singing to itself.

He asked the forest but the trees
were busy talking with each other.

He followed the bison trampling on the ground,
but their footsteps didn't answer.

He was alone like the reflection of the moon.
Nothing would tell him why he would die

except that he saw a meteor
burning out in the sky

and it dawned on him that he would die
because he was alive.

— Marjorie Sadin

PRI CHADASH

Spine Poem by Esther Malka Fein
Remembering Ruthie Fogelman

purple
rainbow
archways
beckoning
offering
welcoming
stability
guidance
to
wavering
wandering
new arrival
to Yerushalayim
oh! Ancient Jerusalem
cobblestoned
nooks
and
crannies
hidden
treasures
to
be
discovered
revealed
recognized
redeemed
restored

— Esther Malka Fein

Pri Hadash (new fruit) – title of a writing workshop given in
Jerusalem by Ruth z"l for many years

IN MEMORY OF RUTH FOGELMAN, z"l

The Comet

When a comet begins its arc,
it will not turn for a thousand years.
Its tail is a silver shadow
trails the light it cannot reach.
So too are the leaders:
they blaze with haste,
while followers orbit behind
the first: a burning stone,
the rest: stardust chasing flame.

— Hayim Abramson

TO MY BROTHER AVI

The lemon tree gives its fruit
 You with your hands planted
 Lines of vitality
 Pulsing quietly
 A compassionate gaze
 That revived the heart
 A lucid word
 That still gives wisdom
 Echoes.

Being reveals itself
 From nothingness
 Wave upon wave
 From silence
 The tomb is sealed
 Something is opened.

— Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz

III. *Earth's Light*

CONNECTION

And between flights
 at Ataturk Airport, here the city
 of Kushta is Constantinople is Istanbul
 and here Rabbi Nachman stands at the gate with a large
 turkey in his hand and it seems the turkey is the evil
 inclination in a person
 He spreads his tail in front of the flight attendants like a
 boarding card and helps himself
 to caviar and champagne in the business class and on his
 head is an ugly
 crown and the name Shabtai Tzvi is sealed inside it
 And Rabbi Nachman looses his arrows at me

— Amichai Chasson
 tr. EC

OMG

Two teenagers saying it
 over and over, sprinkled in
 among their sentences,
 in front of him in line
 at the Dunkin Donuts gave him
 this great idea for a poem
 about God being on everybody's tongue —
 it would be numinous and reverent,
 yet at the same time colloquial
 and irreverent, which was exactly
 what it was: vernacular and a little
 oracular. It would show (not tell)
 how everyone (even those who don't believe
 in God and never give God a thought)
 call upon Him in their everyday gab, palaver, gossip,

chatter, cavil, quibble, grumble. It would be
 an apology of sorts in defense of
 taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain
 (he would look up which Commandment that was).
 It was all coming together in his head
 until his turn came in line and he ordered
 a medium regular, and a glazed donut —
 on second thought, two — then checked
 his phone. Then forgot all about
 the poem. Meanwhile the two teenagers walked
 out the door and across the parking lot,
 still talking about the world with God
 on their tongues, God in every other breath,
 God in their exhalations, God evaporating
 in the air above the Dunkin Donuts
 like a great idea.

— Paul Hostovsky

WINDOW

Tonight's the night! Delicious mysteries silhouette these
 windows.

Like lovers playing hide and seek! Watch the curtains
 open briefly for a gauzy shadow in her nightgown
 wishing upon a star (*may we always be as happy
 as tonight we are*). Down the road, truckers heading
 to the Super 8. A shower. Then a good night's sleep.
 An IHOP breakfast. Eggs and pancakes. Strong coffee.
 Outside, the urgent sweep of sirens. Screaming. Blood.
 The soothing voices: *You're gonna be ok, you're
 gonna be ok you're gonna be ok....* Today
 I know you're gonna be ok.

Just for a day or two, let's put in storage
 all the words/the sounds that might have been/that
 were/that are/
 and will turn all too many of those shuttered secret rooms
 to quicksands of bitterness. *You stupid cow.*
You worthless piece of trash. Slamming doors.
 Broken glass. Worst, the sudden silence after the thud,
 on nights that never should have followed sundown.

Which is *your* window, friend? Let's pretend that we
 can peer below the water's surface. That we can glimpse
 the pinkish coral, caress the tiniest of shells,
 stroke the smoothest stones ribboned in seaweed, a gift
 waiting to be unwrapped. A seagull stands sentry as
 we swim with fish, and turtles, invisible and graceful
 as the mermaids of our childhood fairy tales. That all
 the evil ogres have been vanquished, that the prince and
 princess
 are forever beautiful, and young, and kind, that
 our wishes will be granted. That behind each set
 of curtains is another happy ending.

Listen! You can hear one now.

— Marian K. Shapiro

ANCIENT FOOD

Pale gold comfort in a bowl
 a thick *velouté paysan*
 mottled with flakes
 of darker skin—
 on the tongue a surprise
 of smokiness.

I choose the round yellow ones
 bred smooth and perfectly curved
 that fill my hand. Their weight
 presses plenty in my palm, my
 knife slips easily through the flesh.

In my valley rows of glossy
 dark mounds, the flowers
 beaked with turned back petals
 inconsequential and unlovely
 among garden blooms.
 It's underground matters:
 their specialty the stores
 of food packaged in firm flesh
 in brown wrappers
 waiting on earthy stems
 for the garden fork to
 lift them to sunlight.

In el Parque de la Papa
 ancestral valley in the Andes
 (they're taller, a bit scraggly?)
 the *Arariwas* guard the spirit
 of this ancient food—
 crimson, gold, purple,
 crescent, knobby, fish-
 shaped, mottled, striated—
 homely jewels spilling
 from earth to hands
 hands that read soil, wind,
 flowers, leaves—hands that never
 cut the flesh with a knife as they
 never would their own family.

—Katharine Gregg

STEALING HOME

It was a mostly Jewish neighborhood. Down at the
 schoolyard Billy Schachtel was at bat. Richard Cohen was
 on first. Jon Winkelried was on second. *Schachtel* means
 box in German. Little box. A pack of cigarettes is a
Zigarettenschachtel. But none of us knew that. Because we
 didn't speak German. And we didn't smoke cigarettes.
 We were little. We were only in fourth or fifth grade.
Shtetl means little town in Yiddish, a little town of
 Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.
 But this was after the Holocaust, about twenty years after,

at the bottom of the 9th in the schoolyard of South
 Mountain Elementary School in a mostly Jewish
 neighborhood in Millburn, New Jersey, in the United
 States of America, where Jews played baseball. Jews on
 shtetls in Eastern Europe didn't play baseball. And they
 never won. In fact, they usually got slaughtered.
 Schachtel swung and missed. We pronounced it Shack-
 TELL. Billy Shack-TELL. Not unlike William Tell, the folk
 hero of Swiss historiography. William Tell was a
 contemporary of Arnold von Winkelried, who threw
 himself on a Hapsburg spear in the Battle of Sempach,
 which created an opening for the Swiss Confederacy to
 rush in behind him and win the day. Winkelried was
 about to steal third. Cohen was on first, and maybe
 because the Cohanim were the Jewish priestly class,
 descendants of Aaron, brother of Moses, tribe of Levi,
 Cohen was able to judge that Winkelried was about to
 steal third. So he got ready to steal second. Which is called
 a double steal in baseball. With a judicious eye, Schachtel
 let the next pitch go by. Spoiler alert: Winkelried stole
 third, and he went on to steal home, and he went on to
 graduate from the University of Chicago, to get a job with
 Goldman Sachs, to work his way up until he eventually
 headed the Bonds Department and became richer than
 Croesus, the legendary king of Lydia, a kingdom in
 ancient Anatolia. Coney got thrown out at second, which
 was a kind of sacrifice that allowed Winkelried to steal
 home, not unlike the sacrifice that Winkelried's namesake
 made at the Battle of Sempach in 1386. It was the winning
 run at the bottom of the 9th, so Schachtel never finished his
 turn at bat. Because we'd already won, unlike the other
 Jews, the Jews of history, who almost always lost, and
 never really had a home.

—Paul Hostovsky

DIMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH SPEAKS FOR THE
RAVAGED LAND

I

From darkness a ghost whistle—
 the cello whispering harmonics
 into silence. Then in graying dawn
 other voices enter singly, each tracing
 the same notes like shell-shocked soldiers
 among rubble.

Out of the twisted ribs of the building
 you bombed this night comes a figure,
 skeleton in a danse macabre.
 The tune winds around like a poor idiot
 at first stealthy so as to not give itself away.
 Then faster—fireballs jump from each eye hole,
 it begins to whirl, the arms flail in crescendo
 One, Two and Two-and Two and THREE.

II

Largo, largo—I am weary, so weary
of carrying this weight—I know not who.
My arms drag, torn from the shoulder sockets,
one foot before the other and still

I am here.

Again, again!—the clarion trumpet strikes up the dizzy gallop
among the broken, the broken ones, only to fall weeping
upon the thorns of the blasted rose.

III

Now it is winter again in land
leached and broken. Empty.
But over there is movement.
Bundles of rags are creeping
into the daylight like sparrows
picking at the earth.

IV

Listen! The earth is singing!

The piano trills rivulets
at first alone and then the others
join and swell into dance.

The enemy still squats on his haunches just
over there, but he can't stop the tender sky
from arching nor the small green of grass
here, there, even in the tracks of tanks.

The violin lifts light as a lark turning upward
and the little tune sings itself away.

The land is singing, Mr. Enemy.

You will never win.

—Katharine Gregg

TATTOOS AND TORMENT

I cannot make sense of the evil in our world.
You. You who desecrate your flesh
with images of skulls and cross bones, who
bend silver into grinning skulls and wear them
like amulets, what's that all about? The glee
in wielding the sword or watching
with the crowd? What about surreptitiously
slipping arsenic into someone's whiskey?
Strapping explosives to your body and seeking
a populated boulevard? Killing shoppers? Infants?
Why do you pay to watch movie mayhem
using fake blood, actors faking courage? Why
do you watch cars crashing? Are you the one
manufacturing racks and spikes? Is it bad
if you're only hurting yourself? Why do you
pierce your nose, your lip or other body parts?
Who are you, human beings afflicting
your flesh and your planet? Never explaining.

—Florence Weinberger

I HAVE BEEN TO PLACES OF GREAT DEATH

I have been to places of great death:
Walking the battlefield of Gettysburg,
As a lusty young man of no firm belief
Who stepped between the great rocks
Of Devil's Den and felt his soul shudder
as though he had been a soldier there,
and died in fear a long, long time ago.

I taught my tongue to the gentle Khmers
As civil war raged and the killing fields
Were being sown—I left before the
Heartless murdering began, the killing
Of over a million: teachers and students,
Doctors and farmers, the old, the young,
Each with a photo taken before dying,
Their pictures taped to classroom walls.

And when I visited Hiroshima, now myself
Chastened by death's touch, and knowing
My soul real, knowing of meaning absolute
And of unseen forces that work good or ill,
As I stood at the first ground zero, I once
Again shuddered to feel the pull of madness
(though I knew not if it was my own or some
Remains of that evil which brought the fire
And brimstone of a world wide war....)

But by then I knew I could pray, and so
Opened my desperate heart and sought
His mercy—and then I saw a sort of angel,
Who took me from that place of insanity,
Healing me while we wandered by the
Beauty of the Inland Sea as my storm
Calmed and left me, never to return....

I have been to places of great death, and
I have felt death's cold, careless hands. >>>
But I know now what death itself fears:
The Light, the light eternal which carries
Souls beyond time itself, like the winds
Of a Love exceeding all understanding.

—Nolo Segundo

SIMCHAT TORAH 2023

i.

In the evening we untie the knot of the congregation
and spool out like thread along the walls of the
sanctuary
unfolding as the scroll unfolds. We hold the holy book
with Kleenex so as not to contaminate its edges with our
human sweat. If a terrorist showed up now, we'd make
an easy target. Too easy a target. Too easy always.

The children run around in circles, not counting
the seven times, playing Hide and Seek
and Peekaboo among the legs of the adults.

ii.

I remember my father, how I cut
off the fringes on the kitchen carpet
so he would not trip and fall. In his 90's
he'd taken to dancing anywhere
at any time. One must be vigilant!

I watched the red drops of yarn fall
into my trashcan. Sure enough, he went
ahead and died on us that winter.

iii.

Father, father, how do I not (dot dot dot)
let me count the ways.

Hiding my ugly body behind the perfect scroll
I seek the circle it makes. Words
play Hide and Seek within me.
No turning a page here
no turning over a new leaf.

iv.

Oh note that ends one musical phrase
and begins another, how you taught me
to linger. Oh cadential elision! How I
have learned from you, heard in you,
the ways to carry on after the news

(and if you don't know what I am talking
about, go and count your blessings).

The news that cuts your life in two. Ir-
re-con-cil-able Before and After.

"Hello? Hello? Where are you?"
"In my kitchen. You called my landline."
"You better sit down." The news
that cuts your life in two. No wonder
all telephones used to be black. Your
face reflected in a cup of coffee until

your hand begins to shake uncontrollably
making the image disappear. The end
and the beginning crash a meeting as if
by chance, casually, looking at each
other with suspicion and recognition.

v.

The children inside the circle taste
salt and run faster, sensing the coming
storm. Jonah! Jonah, mon semblable,
mon frère, we are drowning. We drew
the shortest straw. We always draw
the shortest straw. The children play
Hide and Seek and Peekaboo
among the legs of the adults.

vi.

Like the scroll, the year unravels. It
resembles the sweater I knitted
for the baby in many colors and types
of yarn. On this day the last touches. Reach
for the thick needle with its big eye, tip
snub-nosed like a whale. Weave together
what's uneven, mend unintended holes,
broken seams, a lost stitch sliding from row
to row. Catch it! I have sinned! The doors
are closing. Shema Yisrael! Listen to the Ram's
horn! Line seam to seam and sow them
together. Nothing's perfect. Not even G-d!
Stretch, push, spread, pull. Allow your elastic
mind to enlarge, broaden, distend, widen.

vii.

Father, father, how do I (dot dot dot)
Let me count the ways
over an old collection of stamps
where words play Peekaboo with my memory, with

a father and his young daughter. "What does it mean?"
she asks pointing at the capital letters DDR
in the corner of one stamp. She can't yet read a map
but knows enough German to abhor Nein! Schnell!
Verboten! To be eight years old in 1966.

Acronyms not yet in her vocabulary. She sees through
the old trick to make her finish her breakfast when more
milk and sugar on the oatmeal don't work. "Eat your
porridge, girl, or the Russians will come and take you."
Grandfather among the white soldiers on skis
along the Finnish border. The cold. The snow. She
remembers her usually kind and patient father
throwing a tantrum over DDR. "They call themselves
'democratic' when they are nothing of the sort!"

viii.

But watch, watch! The playful words, like unruly children and stitches, are sliding down the seam trying to escape, thinking it's a game. Catch them! Tuck them back in! Beware of the longing between Deuteronomy and Genesis. Such an old love-story. Bind them together. Roll up the scroll for this year. Gather the children who play Hide and Seek and Peekaboo among the legs of the adults.

—Gunilla Theander Kester

INTELLIGENCE

"Don't worry, Mother," said Deborah, sitting uniformed and square jawed in a field-grey phone booth outside a saddik hut. "I'm fine."

"Fine? Debbe, how can you be fine half way around the world? And since when did you start calling me 'Mother'?" Ma's inescapable voice boomed through the long distance static.

"No, really, Mother. I'm OK. Bit of a rough flight getting here, but that part's over now." Deborah took a sip of stale government-issue coffee from a paper cup.

"Rough flight? What happened? Did you get bounced around? With your sensitive inner ears? Were they damaged?"

"Mother, cut it out." Deborah held her tongue for a moment before continuing. "Look, there's never been anything wrong with my ears. The flight was a little rough, that's all. We hit some turbulence in the middle of the Pacific. I weathered it. The rest of the trip was smooth."

"I hope you're not keeping anything from me, Debbe. You know how I worry, and then I worry again, and then I worry some more."

"Yes, Mother. I know." Deborah suppressed a sigh.

"That's why I called your colonel, what's his name, Steinfeld."

"Mother, that's Stanfield. I told you. Colonel Stanfield. From Kansas."

"Right. Stanfield. I called him to make sure you got to Japan safe and sound."

"Actually, Mother, the colonel is in Korea. Where I'll be assigned. I'm just laid over in Japan for an hour or so to change planes." Deborah checked her watch. Outside the booth, big radial engines whined and the tarmac bustled with uniformed officers rushing to make their own connections.

"Did you have to say 'Korea' out loud, Debbe? Do you want to tempt the evil eye? In Korea there's a war going on. With shooting and killing and dying."

Deborah made a mental note of two olive drab trucks, each painted with a red cross. They were parked on the asphalt near a C-47 Skytrain unloading canvas

stretchers filled with wounded from Chuncheon. "It won't be so bad, Mother. I'm slated for a desk job, away from the front."

"That's what Colonel Stanfield told me, thank G-d. He promised. That you'll be sitting, just reading and typing, in an office very far south. In Pusan, nobody's target."

Deborah winced. "Gee, Mother, how did you get him to tell you my location? It's supposed to be classified."

"The general was very nice when the switchboard at the Pentagon finally put me through to him. Once he gave me your colonel's phone number, it was no trouble finding out everything else."

"And what else did you find out, Mother?" In a reflex gesture, Deborah secured the door of her phone booth.

"That my Debbe from Flatbush, with the sensitive inner ears, is a first lieutenant, spying against Red China for President Truman. I'd brag to Sophie and Raisa down the hall, but Colonel Stanfield — Steinfeld? — said don't talk about it, so I bit my lip. To protect you."

Deborah started to shake her head but couldn't quite hold back a grudging smile. "I must say, Mother. Despite your worrying, you are one determined, tough operator. Grabbing hold of top secret stuff from the Army just to track me down."

"If only you'd kept in touch."

"Enough, Mother." Deborah put aside her coffee, drew a deep breath, and hoisted herself to her feet.

"Now listen: By no means do I spy in the field or work directly for the president. I'm a low level, junior intelligence grunt, basically a clerk pushing a pencil. Still, my job over here is a secret that you should lock in the very back of your mind — and throw away the key."

"Anything for you, Debbe. Anything."

Deborah caught herself about to roll her eyes like an adolescent. Then she stiffened her spine and donned her garrison cap. "Mother, I gotta go. Another call is coming in. Probably Colonel Stanfield bent on chewing me out for not phoning you from Seattle. I'll write to you soon." Deborah adjusted her holster.

"Of course soon. And of course after that you'll keep writing."

"I won't stop, Mother. I promise." Deborah opened the door of her phone booth to let in some fresh air. The rumble of massive piston-driven propellers, interspersed with a repetitive banging sound, grew louder. Avgas fumes, mixed with the stench of gangrene, blew into Deborah's nostrils. Her eyes began to burn, then tear.

"You're a good girl, Debbe," said Ma, now much less audible through the rising noise. "A good girl. But also be a safe girl. When letters stopped coming from Europe, that's when I knew everybody there was dead."

— Donald Mender

OH YOU ABANDONED ONES

("God saw that the light was good" Genesis 1:4)
For Nelly Sachs

Oh you riven ones, earth's abandoned ones,
light after Hell's dark night came too late for you.
Wounds of memory, souls torn from flesh and bone –
your spilled blood stains the ground, haunts the earth

that refused to feel the lonely agony of smoke
curled in ashen plumes, a bereft mother and child's
last gasped breaths. How can one close their eyes or wake
in the darkest night unmoved by your exodus of blood?

Towns and shtetls stripped naked, shorn of life, choked –
helpless in death's chambers. How can one worship
fire-spewing gods, bow down at the altars of brute
heart-flawed
commands: hurl babies into burning pits like wood?

How after that dark night, its chaos-fueled void,
Hell's darkest extreme, can we believe earth's light is good?

– Amos Neufeld

alienation

when the place you wanted to move to
because, there, no one will know you

becomes the world

– Allison Whittenberg

O MEN OF WILL AND LONGING

It is astonishing
How the distress of sin can weigh on the soul
Before the plea for forgiveness
When we are with ourselves for a fraction of a second
And how
Oppressive solitude can be
In the moment when we
Remain
Alone in the company of our sins
After all
The world always stands in the place where we saw it last
Stuck like a tree in the earth and unable to move
And wishing like us for the kindness of those who long.

– Dan Albo
(tr. EC)

V. Flights

Let me sleep
Let me sleep in song
in that quiet chamber
with hushed audience of absence
the flow of sound inside
the flow of pulse of breath
Let my soul hold this great affection
music playing in my ear
while my heart sleeps
in solitude in this unseen
gift to hold from the spheres

– Reizel Polak
2022

K. 488

is the one I turn to
in trouble and joy

Mozart, my Main Man
Richard Goode the man
to play it.

I love the way the strings come on
amble together across the stage –
a June afternoon, blue with puffy clouds

and then the winds take it up
their distinct voices speaking
to one another . . .

how the composer lays out
a perspective from the point of origin
a perfect vista, opening like a fan
narrowing closed again

then flings
to the gods a cantilever of notes held
one against another and pressing out and up till
something
must give way –

I feel it at my heart as I depress these keys
as though I can make them sound –

then gently pulls it back and sets it down
without spilling a note.

I want it never to end and yet
it does, it must, and when it does
there is nothing more to say.

– Katharine Gregg

WHEN JESSYE NORMAN OPENS HER MOUTH

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever...

Psalms 23:6

Although the furniture is odd
and dated, the windows cleaned daily
by trumpet blasts of angels, whenever
I hear Jessye Norman's voice, I'm
in heaven like gliding on escalators
and swooning as when shopping
in the old Marshall Fields on State St.
The mind stops, thinking "This can be mine:
lingerie — second floor, coats — fifth, mezzanine
travel items, gift wrapping."

And the dream abides: no charges, no returns
for when Jessye Norman sings from old vinyls,
my plate is full, never empty. On any day
I won't hear "Enjoy," "Have a good one,"
"Simply divine on you." When Jessye sings,
the pearls of heaven tumble from,
surround her open vowels, enchanting
my palatial house.
— Paula Goldman

REREADING

When I get to the end of a book I like, I like
to go back to the beginning. Beginning
with the front matter (I like the phrase *front matter*,
its vaguely scientific ring), I like lingering
in the blurbs, then the copyright history, then right
on to the first page. The first sentence. I like to reread
that first sentence. And the second sentence.
Then the first paragraph, letting it pull me in, in
the way of currents, riptides, until I've dived
right back into the flow of the book, a book
that was so good when I got to the end I said, "God,
that was amazing, how did the writer do that?" That
is the question a good book begs. And I begin
looking for answers, finding them again and again.
— Paul Hostovsky

BEFORE DECIDING

We will do and we will hear.
Exodus 24:7

Early to the word,
released like breath
into the receiving air,
the air of which we're made,
yet late to the world,
we walk before thought,
the act enacted always
already before there's time
to formulate a theory

of action. We are
the flesh
of what deciding is,
our incarnation older
than decision,
responding to the law
before it's given
in a time much
earlier than hearing,
earlier than judgment,
much older than belief.

— D.B. Jonas

*

A treasure, and in it a question —
Under your feet it lies.
Emotion, uncomprehended.
In your heart you are certain
Of the unascertainable —
In seconds truly divine
An hour of favor made contact.

Preserver, fashion an anchor
That will fulfill a sign —
Blow on the concoctions of the heart.
In mourning the writer knows a thread.
Give him from curse conclusion —
Vainly the sojourner below assessed
Where all is hither and thither.

— Araleh Admanit
tr. EC

THE TEARING OF THE END

The exodus from my four cubits
Is harder for me
Than tearing my poems
To shreds
And scattering them to the winds

The ascent of my father's stairs
Is harder for me
Than reading my poems
Anew
And their flowing in power

The parting from black straps
Bound on my left arm and my head
Is harder for me
Than the piercing of my ear
On the doorpost
Of the culture of this time

— Araleh Admanit
tr. EC

RIDICULOUSNESS

Said the poet:
I prefer the ridiculousness
Of writing a poem
To the ridiculousness
Of not writing.

Said the lover:
I prefer the ridiculousness
Of the love between man and women
To the ridiculousness
Of being alone.

Said the believer:
I prefer the ridiculousness
Of faith in G-d
To the ridiculousness of unbelief.

And I in my insignificance said:
I prefer the smile
Of the Master of the Universe
To the laugh
Of the Adversary.

—Oded Mizrachi
tr. EC

POET ON A DONKEY

Out of my wallet I pulled
Four poets —*
Three hundred and seventy
New Israeli Shekels.

And I wondered to myself
Whether any present-day poet
Is worth one plugged
Agurah.

Come next generation
Men of the Great Void
Will replace the poets
On the bills of fake money.

Nothing will be left
For the next generation
If G-d forbid a poet
Riding on a donkey
Should fail to appear.

—Oded Mizrachi
tr. EC

*Natan Alterman, Leah Goldberg, Saul Tchernikhovsky, and Rachel, poets of earlier generations, are pictured on the 200, 100, 50 and 20 shekel bills.

FIRST HAKAFAH*

Ten winters I sought the saddik
in books in graves deep in the middle of the forest
roaring like a wounded beast naked in the mikveh or in
the sea
in the spring in the desert in through fasting in the
midnight prayer with the burnt out
candle in a hidden and revealed melody in the scream of
a still small voice
by rolling in the snow silently whispering combinations
of letters
in a filthy cellar in the south in Jerusalem in the hills
in bonfires the fire was not bound in the sentry
box aiming my rifle with eyes closed
in dancing in tipsiness in levelling the glasses of arak
in annulling myself like the dust of the earth roaring
the tsaddik will flourish in his days in stifling chaos on
Mount Eval the city of Shechem is burning I
want to go in to the saddik
In the cave inside the closed gate the table
is set we are all waiting for the quorum grant us
and we will bend the knee to the holy King of the
universe
In an emergency I do not breathe
With this ends the first hakafa

— Amichai Chasson (tr. EC)

*Hakafah — a procession where the Torah is carried round the synagogue, part of the service for Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Law)

THE FLIGHT

When we ascend from the plain
The *chayot* and their image come closer and closer and
on their backs
The tree
Covered with the foliage of my ancestral genealogy
My grandfather the kabbalistic tsaddik Rabbi Yehuda
Tzvi of Stretin on a galloping ox burning with
torches
And that old man in that place Rav Avrutschi
On the eagle flies Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditschev
rising up on white wings of lovingkindness
The Lion with Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk in the beauty
of a firmament the color of sapphire
The Maggid of Mesritsch Adam with the rainbow halo
and radiant inner light
And the Maggid of Zlatschov and the Maggid of
Nadborna and the Rabbi of Elik, may their merit
protect

Amen

And my mother and sister all who dwell
And I ask them about the will of the Most High and they
answer

And we fly together higher than high above the clouds
 After all the days have been passed all the achievements
 achieved all the unions unified and all the
 crowns spread out
 After we have filled our bellies with the Torah of the
 divine kabbalist Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag
 We climb the ladder and the rungs of the ladder higher
 and higher
 The will to receive in order to influence
 Ascends and is clear and spread out and arrives
 And the worlds of Creation, Formation, Action and
 Emanation their legs are equal and they stand
 on the Mount of Olives
 And the mystery of Kingdom which is of the nature of
 Action in the secret of what is written and it will
 be in the end of days
 The Mount of the House of the Lord will be established
 on top of the mountains
 And birds and radiant crowns
 We are souls without bodies bodies without souls
 competing in a circle
 And there is no breath and no death and no pain
 And all is included and poured forth in one to love
 We go up ten stories and the whole galaxy is souls and
 souls flying the flight of wheels around Him
 And the voice of His channels and the voice of His harps
 and all His songs
 And I rest in peace with my fathers and mothers
 And my sufferings and longings are also at rest and quiet
 And only my will does not end but runs around insatiably

— Chana Kremer

THE BRIDGE

We stand on the shores of the river of doubt,
 alone, yet close, and we fear the crossing,
 for the water roars and rushes out
 like a stony gale from a tempest tossing.

Afar you speak into the current's roar,
 your voice a thread in thunder.
 I reach—but hesitate, for before
 I've slipped and fallen under.

Trust's bridge is built of simple things:
 a glance, a hand extended,
 not ended fights or Claddagh rings,
 but broken things, amended.

So build we not with steel or stone,
 but proven vows to stay
 A promise made in the darkling night
 and kept in the brimming day.

And should this bridge give way to fate,
 and we slip through its seeming,
 Let not it steal this gift away:
 that trust was worth the dreaming.

— Ashby Neterer

FOLLOWING THE LAW

*No, said the holy man, it's not necessary to accept everything
 as true; one must only accept it as necessary (notwendig).*
 Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess*

The law's not there to be obeyed.
 It has no claim to truth. It's not
 what's subject to denial, inviting
 violation, but what we cannot fail
 to bump against in darkest night,
 in the retrospective light of day.

The law is all we're subject to,
 the evidence of our subjection,
 the trace of all that's powerless
 in things, of what can't be reduced
 to the cozy complements of liberty
 and destiny, but what was always
 there before we ever came to be.

The law is there where fascination
 reigns, where what we cannot see
 is also that from which we cannot
 turn away, a land of cannot nots,
 the doubled negative negating all
 negation, older than perception,
 a thing more ancient than cognition
 or volition, older even than creation.

And though it's nowhere clearly
 written, it never fails to make
 a difference, and is in fact that
 paradox that differentiation is,
 where who I am is one who cannot
 choose to feel or not to feel, a thing
 all by itself alone, a thing complete,
 that might remain indifferent.

The law is all we struggle to deny,
 and yet this struggle's our awakening,
 the birth of each uniqueness, not
 a rule by which we can elect to live,
 no truth that we can find or place
 that we can occupy or flee, no calculus
 of gain and loss, but the terrible
 exigency out there that lives right here
 within you and in me.

— DB Jonas

It all rhymes!

I tell you I can hear the chimes
from the highest cathedral steeple
to the lowest impoverished people,
and feel the rhythms of chosen words
in the elk herds and migratory birds,
and the flowing symmetry and syntax
of rivers from Columbia to Halifax!

I hear the heavenly harmonies
in roaring seas and windblown trees,
and read the perfect metered verse
from midwife nurse to horse-drawn hearse,
that range from a sky aglow with stars
to earthbound pilgrims in their cars,
the rushing flow in living seeds I sow,
and remaining here to see them grow,
and the lovely counterpoint of themes
in my sleep or waking wildest dreams!



— Elhanan ben Avraham

TO RENEW TIME BY WAY OF POETRY

Will it approach, will it almost, for a voiceless
Fleeting moment. We awaited this burden, prophecies
That were never told in this city.
For them. For. A voice to her. To them,
But Mother tongue, what will be with her.
The essence of her life, beneath the snow will bleed:
So do not forget to struggle for your lives.

Eternities that don't let go are murmuring like wounds.
From prolonged sleep, to return the time that awaits:
Redemption lay in wait, a bolt rises from sleep.
The gate and the poem. Rises. Will not return empty-
handed.

It is difficult to live in this city without dawn
Lost. Desperate for a comforting breath. The goal
But a step from the branches of the lamp. The oil. So
inhaling
From the heart of poetry sneaks, from a dreaming
ladder.

Not by its force, by its spirit, sign to sign: all
Exposed. Fields. Torches, fire whitened.
Like a strand of hair: from Sartaba to Grofina.*
Like a root, a row, a rabid silence. Its glow
In its oil. Fires. Mother of generations. As of a sudden
Spurts glowing from the mountain belly. Little that's left:
Dead from generation to generation will ignite a path of
light.

Rise for the crescent moon. To shine. In a ritual bath of
mystical intent.
In a tunnel of speech, to purify in its mending.

— Herzl Hakak

Translated by Schulamith C. Halevy

*Sartaba, Grofina – stations in a relay of bonfires on mountain
tops between Babylon and Jerusalem, signaling the birth of the
new moon

VI.

ABBA*

I.

Their time is up, the children need to go.
The girls will leave their dolls behind, the boys
the tricycles they ride; the children's toys
will be abandoned, one by one. We know
what happens next, how evening breezes blow
the children's candles out as time destroys
the games the children play, as time deploys
tin soldiers on a chessboard, to and fro.

The children, too, are forced to shuffle to
and fro like bishops, knights and rooks that fall
when kings are checked. Although we aren't sure
we know what's best, we do what grownups do —
we pick the children up and put them all
to bed — or can they play a little more?

II.

To bed — or can they play a little more?
The children hate to go to bed, and so
do we, afraid our dreams will ebb and flow
all night without a sense of meaning or
significance. A dozen seagulls soar
above unceasing waves, while down below
the surface of the sea, an undertow
keeps pulling us — how can we reach the shore?

How can we reach the shore indeed? It seems
the undercurrents push us far away
before we have a chance to go explore
the archipelago we've seen in dreams,
although the darkness hasn't vanquished day,
although some daylight still remains before.

*see note p. 16

III.

Although some daylight still remains before the darkness crowns itself, strong storm-winds blow and rattle every window pane. Although this house was built to last, we find the door is shaking and we hear the storm-winds roar as if a flood is coming soon. We know the walls are made of stone, but even so, we feel the quaking of the floor.

The wind. The rain. The cold. The children are afraid to sleep; how can we hope to hide our fears of things we can't control which grow from hour to hour? Is there a single star that shines tonight, is there a moon outside? The children need to sleep. Fate's rivers flow.

IV.

The children need to sleep. Fate's rivers flow and overflow their banks, as rapidly as time, as rapidly as destiny.

If this is true, do children need to go to bed? Perhaps the dreams they'll see will show them how to stay afloat. Perhaps if we adults will dream like them, we'll also see what lies above us and what lies below.

Is this a game of chess? Is this a game at all? Perhaps it's just a children's song that children sing in dreams, for we don't know its music or its words, which seem the same to adult ears. Our raft is pulled along so rapidly; swift currents never slow.

V.

So rapidly — swift currents never slow and never halt. Like tempest winds that do not stop, fate's rivers keep on flowing through the evening, through the night, and we don't know what lies ahead. An oar could help us row our leaking raft ashore, where shadows who we barely see are running, racing to high ground, above the waterfalls below.

Elusive shadows keep on running, one by one, arriving where they haven't been before; the past becomes the present for the shadows and for us — or do they run too rapidly? They reach time's window in their racing pace — time's window and time's door.

VI.

Their racing pace — time's window and time's door may close and shut in front of them, despite the efforts shadows make to outrun night, to outrun nightmares too. One, two, three, four — run faster, shadows, in the darkness or the swiftness of the rising rivers might engulf us all. Be careful now, for light is being quenched by rain and fate's downpour.

So many things can't be ignored — the storm that doesn't end; the words which do not rhyme; the sea that keeps on crashing on the shore; the way that shadows in our dreams transform our sleep; how rapidly the gates of time start closing — even children can't ignore.

VII.

Start closing — even children can't ignore how this and that have started closing: the box in which they store tin soldiers, dolls and blocks once used for building towers; the candy-store with licorice and lollypops; the door behind which shadows hide; old rusty locks whose keys are lost or missing; antique clocks no longer working, scattered on the floor.

What else has started closing? Pawns, rooks, kings, queens, bishops, knights; taxicabs, buses, cars; train stations; ports; an archipelago explored in dreams; the dreams themselves; the rings of Saturn, comets, Jupiter's moons, Mars; a galaxy whose stars no longer glow.

VIII.

A galaxy whose stars no longer glow has fallen from the sky, has fallen deep into fate's rivers. We, who hoped to keep a vigil in its memory, don't know exactly what to do: to point and show the world a hole where stars once shone? To creep along the ground and sigh? To cry, to weep? To help the children go where they must go?

Without the stars, how can the children see how clocks are being swept away by rain, by wind, by night. Everything that ticks, tocks, ticks, tocks, is silenced in the dark. Though we may try to stop the flood, we try in vain; the children learn fate's rivers snatch all clocks.

IX.

The children learn fate's rivers snatch all clocks.
 How can I help the children, Abba, they
 won't know if they should go to sleep or stay
 awake; the children will not know who knocks
 upon the door, nor will they know who locks
 it while they dream. Who locks it, Abba, say
 his name, I also want to know. The day
 is ending now, enclosed inside a box.
 "Enclosed inside a box, is time alive
 or dead?" "What happened to the clocks?" I hear
 a dozen shadows asking questions, I
 can hear them in the dusk. "Will we survive
 the night?" "Is water rising everywhere?"
 "Will time survive?" they ask a darkened sky.

X.

"Will time survive?" they ask a darkened sky.
 Who's asking questions now, the children or
 the shadows' shadows, seeing how time's door
 is being shut, is being locked. Am I
 supposed to find the answers here? But why
 is it so dark? With neither candles nor
 a match, I barely see the walls and floor;
 how can I find the spot where answers lie?

What happened to the moon, what happened to
 the stars? I know the sun is gone, the day
 enclosed inside a box. I knew the night
 to come was destined to be dark, but who
 decreed this dark? It's hard to find one's way
 bereft of moon, or stars, or any light.

XI.

Bereft of moon or stars or any light,
 I barely see the house ahead — is there
 a fence that must be climbed, is there a stair
 to mount? What colors are its walls? Black? White?
 Blue? Purple? Yellow? Red? What should be bright
 as daylight is now dim. And everywhere
 I turn — right, left, up, down — I only hear
 the pounding, pounding, pounding of the night.

But do the children hear it, too? Or are
 they safe inside the house, as I have prayed
 for ever since the storm began, since clocks
 were swept away, since rain put out each star.
 Where are the children? Abba, I'm afraid
 they hear the ocean pounding on hard rocks.

XII.

They hear the ocean pounding on hard rocks.
 Please help the children, Abba, help them so
 they will not hear the ocean further, though
 it keeps on pounding through the night. Who locks
 the door? Unlock it, please. Unlock the clocks
 before it is too late, and let them show
 the children when it's safe for them to go
 outside to play with toys and building blocks.

Unlock the week, unlock the month and year,
 unlock the future, I — I am afraid
 that time is shutting down — unlock the sky
 so stars can start returning — I — I fear
 the children cannot play the games they played —
 O help me Abba, Abba, help me — I

XIII.

O help me Abba, Abba, help me — I
 can hear the rising waters, hear the rain
 and wind, the pounding on the window pane,
 the pounding on the door. I fear the sky
 won't find its stars again or nullify
 the darkness of this night. The hurricane
 grows stronger and the shadows pray in vain
 for it to stop, for it to cease and die.

What happened to the archipelago
 of dreams, each island green with trees, each tree
 ablaze with light? What happened to the light
 that shone before, the light I used to know?
 For I, aboard a raft adrift at sea —
 I'm frightened, Abba, frightened of the night.

XIV.

I'm frightened, Abba, frightened of the night.
 Come closer, Abba, why are you so far
 away — as distant as a missing star,
 as distant as the absent moon? Despite
 the darkness, Abba, look, I sit and write
 these lines to you. Listen, the children are
 now crying, and the shadows, too. Unbar
 the door that keeps you out, and bring us light.

I hear a voice's echo; listen to
 the echo, Abba: "All the children pray
 in vain tonight, their time is up." I know
 you read the lines I write — but Abba, do
 you hear the words I hear: "They cannot stay,
 their time is up, the children need to go?"

XV.

Their time is up, the children need to go
to bed — or can they play a little more?
Although some daylight still remains before
the children need to sleep, fate's rivers flow
so rapidly, swift currents never slow
their rushing pace; time's window and time's door
start closing; even children can't ignore
a galaxy whose stars no longer glow.

The children learn fate's rivers snatch all clocks.
"Will time survive?" they ask a darkened sky
bereft of moon or stars or any light;
they hear the ocean pounding on hard rocks.
O help me Abba, Abba help me, I —
I'm frightened, Abba, frightened of the night.

—Yakov Azriel

VII. Will

ELLIPSES

I can't
I must
I tremble
I faint

I wake
I will
I won't
I should

I can't
I must
I shall
I shake

I want
I would
I go
I wait

I knock
I enter
I do

I did

Thank God

—James B. Nicola

WE FOUGHT BACK

(for Mordecai Anielewicz and the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters)

We rose to fight. Defiant. Fierce will born
of pain. Left our mark: wrote our own history
with pistols, rifles, Molotov cocktails, a few machine guns.
To scream the truth — cries fired by fear and fury

to the deaf world that had closed its gates, abandoned us.*
We chose our own death. Fighting. That first day
We rose up, fought back, stunned the SS,
forced their death-stained squads to flee; held them at bay

a month, fighting from alleyways, rooftops,
burning buildings, smoke and gas-filled bunkers
they flushed us from. We fought against all hope,
that we would survive their flamethrowers, artillery, tanks.

We fought to see our dream come true: *we fought back*.
And leapt aflame from roofs, defiant —
we fought and left our mark.

—Amos Neufeld

*April 19, 1943

QUESTIONS IN DARKENED ROOMS

הַיָּאָד נָתַתְּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׂבָשְׁמִים וְנַעֲבֹד עֲבֹדָה זָרָה
Sanhedrin 67

Doubts creep in on wings of grief.
Or greed. I am broken by news
of a broken world. Or, I want more
goodies than fate would grant me.

So, I sequester myself in a dark room.
Candles burning, incense. Zen with a touch
of Jewish credibility? Until out of the gloom
a voice: whispers *Let's worship an idol* —
words with a thin credibility to help
cast off the burden of being a Jew.

From somewhere out of the shadows, I cry out:
How can I possibly jettison the yoke of Hashem?
Chosen, unique, aching I return to the core.
Continue crying and carry on the flickering
light of truth in darkening times.

—Vera Schwarcz

WEDDED TO JERUSALEM

שְׂקִדּוּשָׁה רִאשׁוֹנָה קִדְּשָׁה לְשַׁעֲתָה וְקִדְּשָׁה לְעֵתִיד לְבָא

Not only because I live here.
More because every day there is a whiff in the air
from King David's and King Solomon's time,
a lingering commitment, an eternal marriage bond
between the Jewish people and this piece of land
that rises (noisily, brashly) above the mundane.

Our partner is the Divine that may still be glimpsed
in children's laughter, elders ambling up-hill slowly,
bird song loud beyond the eye-catching, ear-jarring
parakeets, lotus unfurling in the community garden.

Being married to the holiest city in the world is not easy.
We struggle to earn her love afresh each day.

— Vera Schwarcz

BLINKING LIFE
Jerusalem, 20.11.18

I have forgotten how to roar –
Just a clearing of the throat with half a voice.
The friable softness of Divine forgetfulness is the
featherbed of my days.
I curl up in nothing.
Life stares at me with a nasal air.
With the gaze of a calf.
Flesh.
Life blinks when the light is too blinding.
Immediately one pulls the blanket over another full year.
Fetus.
The nothing gives birth to will ex nihilo.
And the fact that there is nothing means there is being.

— Imri Perel
Tr. EC

[UNTITLED]

I will come before the Throne of Glory
with my pride full of holes
my tail between my legs
sobbing the Song of the Partisans.

— Hamutal Bar-Yosef
tr. EC

[UNTITLED]

Not only snakes shed their skin
One might think that only snakes and other
selected creatures are given to shed their skin
A human being can also shed a hard-
to-live-in skin Someone who sheds looks like
someone who is clean with eyes giving light
the feel of backbone Being human shedding
isn't so easy One has to work at it wrestling
with tangled messy thoughts omitting speech
that confuses misleads One must keep an eye
on the demons-in-waiting their coarse impulse
behind
every conduct that wounds Letting them lose
their hold the scales of cold-skin shrinking
breaking apart falling away Letting them
float off under a wave of deep sighing breath . . .
Comes the shaking pure raw trembling
like a woman in labor entering the trembling
letting the old skin shrivel behind
Someone who loves this being will surely witness
a new shine a deep resolve a fearless look

— Reizel Polak
2017

THREE POEMS

[UNTITLED]

1

The will to create did not break forth
It listened mutely to my circles
Around and around
Widening
Watery, sometimes devious
How long

Till certainty ripens
And the cry of Here am I
Goes up from the abyss of doubt
From the abyss
Of not being.

2

The ability to watch myself
Vacillate
Brought forth compassion
And patience
A listening
To being as it becomes
A listening
To Your circles.

[UNTITLED]

Out of confusion and darkness a new being is woven
 It is woven despite and because of
 In dark of eclipse in collisions in falls in disappointments
 When there is no air
 In moments of beauty in a glance in listening in the
 touch of a hand
 It is woven in the mountains, in the sounds of the
 shepherd's flute and in bustling cities
 And I am longing
 For the appearance
 Rise, Shekhinah, from the dust
 Put on the garments of your splendor.

TO THE RETURNED CAPTIVES

Why should we be left out
 And if we dwelt in darkness for years
 Doubled forces of life
 Will be your portion.

Arise, put on strength,
 To lead the people in dances.

You have looked with your eyes at hell
 At the evil ones
 And did not bow
 Did not bend the knee

A drum beats with enlivening rhythm
 Straightening the heart's crooked places

Daughters of valor
 Like Sarah in Pharaoh's castle
 Crowned with splendor.
 Fearless daughters of Israel
 Throw off pettiness and depression
 Throw off victimhood
 Proclaimers of resurgence.

— Tziporah Faiga Lifshitz
 tr. EC

JUST A HEART

While the weary and despairing
 seek coherence, meaning, and finality
 What we carry
 we know will renew
 outlasting even the starling swarms and the
 estuarine currents
 and just a heart ties together its end and
 its beginning

— Andrew Oram

FUSION

That visible as violence might burn
 In the air the fusion of concerted minds
 By insight ineluctably confined
 In a magnetic circle of concern;
 That thus a power might generate to turn
 A counter-movement to entropic time
 And lend attraction to the whole and prime
 To which all fleeing fractions must return —
 This I have seen, not in prophetic trance
 But in the reasoning of a mind compelled
 By the sheer daylight force of evidence
 That this must and can be. I have not erred:
 I swear by earth and stars, by me and you
 That though the world be false, yet this is true.
 — Esther Cameron

VII. 3 Words from Weiser

When I connect the dots,
 The people and events
 Like stars that mark my skies,

I find a constellation,
 A pattern of dark meaning
 Whose shape I recognize.

It is the face of Wisdom
 Veiled by doubtful clouds;
 I hear her broken cries.

*

The beating of each heart
 And the pulse of every vein.
 Are universal signs.

The explosion of a star
 And the falling drops of rain
 Are marked with careful lines.

But the conduct of our days,
 Random and erratic,
 Must be our own design.

*

On second thought, it seems
 The hidden hand of God
 Has brought us to this place

Where we have lived before
 With all our ancestors
 Whose spirit we embrace.

All other theories fail
 To explain the wanderings
 Whose steps we now retrace.

— David Weiser

SONG

There's one who builds and one who tears down
 There's one who uproots and one who sows
 There's one who flees and there's one who stays
 There's one who abandons and one who cares
 There's one who calms down and one who gets mad
 There's one who takes care and one who stomps
 There's one who angers and one who makes peace
 There's one who discards and one who gathers
 There's one who talks and there's one who acts
 There's one who plants and one who uproots
 There's one who neglects and one who preserves
 There's one who acts and there's one who brags
 There's one who is grateful and one who complains
 There's one who's awake and one who's asleep
 There's one who waters and one who burns
 There's one who holds on and one who gets tired
 There's one who writes and one who erases
 There's one who cooks and one who spits out
 There's one who screams and one who is silent
 There's one who loves and one who hates
 There's one who tears down and one who builds.

Hamutal Bar-Yosef
 tr. EC

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